The Re-Appearing

by

Charles Morice

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THE RE-APPEARING

I will follow Thee: but —

(Luke ix: 61).

THE RE-APPEARING

(IL EST RESSUSCITÉ!)

A Vision of Christ in Paris

BY

CHARLES MORICE

TRANSLATED BY
JOHN N. RAPHAEL

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
~~CONINGSBY DAWSON~~

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INTRODUCTION

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EVERY now and then there appears a book which stirs the heart of a nation by confessing to some under-current emotion whose presence we had barely begun to suspect, and by reducing that emotion to a thought, which a few advanced minds may have been thinking, but which none have dared to express. Such books are in the air long before they get written. Their author seems rather their transcriber than their originator.

The Re-Appearing (Il Est Ressuscité) is such a book. It has woven the longing for an ethical awaking into a story, at once so personal and so universal that it has revealed France to herself. It reveals both her passionate desire for religious idealism and her cynical despair of the ideal's success. It is written as

though it were a matter of recent history, still fresh in the minds of men, and narrates how Christ appeared in Paris on December 14th, 1910.

There is significance in the fact that Paris is selected as the scene of His return. When He came to the East He appeared in Palestine, the centre of religion; when He comes to the West He appears in Paris, the centre of culture. Religion has always been the culture of the Orient, whereas culture has usurped the functions of religion in the modern Occident.

The purpose of Christ's re-appearing is to make an emphasized appeal to the Nicodemuses of the world—the men whose spiritual imagination is darkened by overmuch learning and whose wills are hesitant through impartiality. The common people, the women and the children, hear Christ gladly as they have done in every age. He does not concern Himself with them on His second coming.

The heart of mankind has always accepted Him; it is the intellect that has refused Him. To men whose emotions have been strangled by their intellects, to men who say, "Lord, I will follow Thee, *but,*—" Christ now addresses Himself.

Monsieur Charles Morice has typified this class in the character of Narda, a journalist admired for his brilliancy and acuteness, yet unsuccessful because of his lack of conviction and wavering direction of purpose. He can see two sides to every question. He is keen to discern the faults in both his own and other men's work. He has odds and ends of half-finished plays and poems locked away in his desk; his desire for impossible perfection has curtailed his self-faith and daring. His power of criticism has withered his enthusiasm. Yet, for all he is a failure, he is feared and respected for the silent genius that he has. Given a cause that he believed in, he could become a leader of men. When, on December

11th, 1910, the last page of the evening papers of Paris is blank, it is to him that his brother journalists turn for an explanation as to one natively their superior.

The mystery as it unfolds itself, is told largely through the thoughts and judgments of Narda, the modern Nicodemus, and is told in a wonderfully natural and vivid fashion. A full day before anyone has become aware of Christ's return, he has remarked a Stranger sitting opposite to him, the total impression of whose beauty is magnificently common-place, the sovereign serenity of whose soul shines out through His eyes with a constant, steady intensity. When the secret has at last been divulged, that the Son of God is resident in Paris, and the crowd of journalists have rushed off to *L'Hôtel des Trois Rois* where He is staying, it is with Narda that Christ holds His first conversation in the deserted café.

It is notable that at no point in the story does anyone doubt that the Stranger is Christ. No one raises the question, "Art Thou He that should come, or look we for another?" His authority is at once admitted. The only question raised is as to whether He is wanted—whether there is any room for Him in a modern commercial civilisation. The attitude of France is not one of doubt, but of expediency and criticism. The first remark that Narda addresses to Christ has this note of complaining in it: "Lord, I thought you would have returned in some other manner." To which Jesus replies, "Have you no understanding? Visible or invisible, the Son of Man returns every day."

In this reply of Jesus the keynote of the book is struck—the wise, unemotional sanity which makes the story not a fantastic vision, but a symbolised real happening of daily occurrence. There is nothing abnormal about His re-appear-

ing, for He has never been absent. He becomes visible for eleven days simply that he may enforce His teachings, not to rehearse Galilean history. To His teaching He adds nothing, for as He tells Narda, "My work is finished for all eternity."

In its first surprised enthusiasm the heart of France is startled into the exclamation, "My Lord and My God!" But after a moment's reflection the cold intellect awakes, and begins to analyse and reason. Narda and his countrymen have been hurried into love without considering the cost of loving. The worth of anything to them, with their highly developed commercial sense, must be in some gain attached which is material and personal. *L'Hôtel des Trois Rois* is inundated by people who are willing to follow Christ if, by so doing, they are following their own interest. That interest may be represented in many ways, financial, the gratification of ir-

reverent curiosity, self-aggrandisement. Few of the people who come to Jesus can understand His saying, "My kingdom is not of this world." To most of them it is extremely irritating, impractical and evasive. Life to them is something concrete and external, not spiritual and internal.

In a series of brilliantly clever incidents Monsieur Morice points the contrast between the standards and aims of Christ and those of our Christian civilisation. There is no grotesqueness, no exaggeration—this is all as it might happen. With a daring stroke of realism he introduces living persons into His narrative.

In spite of misunderstandings, the atmosphere of Christ's presence begins to make itself felt. All over France ideals are heightened, no one can explain quite how or why. The psychologists declare that a new form of moral epidemic is abroad and a terribly contagious one,

against which there is no known remedy. The effect is to dislocate all commercial and social relations—to destroy much of our boasted modern progress. There being no evil in France, many people are thrown out of employ. Of necessity there is no need for a Police administration or for law courts. While truth and love of one's neighbour are the standards of conduct, there is scarcely any news of sufficient interest to be worth printing in the newspapers. Advertisements and stock quotations are of course stricken out, for they by their very nature are lies. The relations between capital and labour are dangerously simplified—dangerously for the capitalist. Fewer marriages take place—all those that are loveless are banned. Government becomes uneasy—this corrosive honesty is eating out the roots of society. The price of stocks is falling. There is no more gambling, consequently the Bourse is almost idle. The money-market is disorganised. Busi-

ness is at a standstill. There is a growing amount of unemployed labour. The first signs of panic are perceptible.

With polished satire and ruthless frankness Monsieur Morice describes what would happen to modern commerce, upon which all our modern social structure is founded, if Christ's system of ethics was applied. There is no escape from his logic—it would mean the collapse of most of our methods of production and exchange. For whereas Christ's system of economics has as its ultimate object only spiritual and unselfish gains, the object of the economics of the western world is definitely selfish and materialistic.

Narda watches the changes which are resulting from Christ's visible presence in Paris. Concentrated in the camera of his mind we view the struggle which is in process in all men's minds. It is a fight between heart and intellect, between renunciation and self-gratification—a conflict which is eternal. Scepticism

plays no part in it—the choice is simple, between fleshly comfort and spiritual perfection. It narrows itself down to the single question, which all France has shortly to answer, "Do I want Christ?"

The way in which Narda argues is typical of the modern cultured mind, of which he is representative. He is oppressed with knowledge, and yet is not wise. He knows too much about everything and too little about the one essential thing, the relation between God and himself. He values thought, but he sets no store by affection. Without affection he has not the energy of choice. He lacks and covets the valour of ignorance which transformed mediocre persons in the middle ages into heroes and saints. He relies too much upon reason, which is the faith of the intellect, and not at all upon love, which is the faith of the heart. He is a conscious drifter, incapable of guiding his own life and too proud to submit himself to a higher guidance, even when

he has recognised it as higher. He can turn off admirable literary phrases of a destructive kind, but he can arrive at no conclusions. He is perfectly aware of his failings. "I know what He wants," he says, "but I don't know what I want myself. The best thing about me is that I suffer from both my knowledge and my ignorance." He has the insight to apprehend Christ's message: "That is what He has come to tell us! It is that we must return to life. It is that we must be born again." But he adds with cynical self-knowledge, "We have known that for a long time." His final solution to his personal problem is one of vacillating selfishness; "Christ's law is too hard. God thinks too well of us. The difficulty is my cowardice. I will wait."

Narda may wait, but the sequence of inevitable events marches forward. This excess of goodness cannot last. The crisis is imminent. The appetite for sensation

of an increasing number of men is already satiated; they are biding their time till the hour is ripe to strike.

The initial attack on the reign of virtue comes from the scientists. They go in a body to Christ, puffed up with the pride of statistical knowledge, to compel Him to answer questions. They have no reverence and, on the contrary, are rather patronising. Have they not already penetrated some little way into the forbidden secrets of life and death? Christ promises to declare Himself next day at Montmartre.

Standing on the hill, with all Paris lying expectant at His feet, Christ tells the truth about our age. It is Pilate being judged by Jesus—the cold, self-seeking western world brought to trial before compassion and faith. When He has ended, the women and children are happily smiling; but no man asks himself the question, "Do I want Christ?" Every

man knows that, whatever his desire, he cannot afford Him. Narda sums up the situation when he says to his friend Larrivé, "My dear fellow, I repeat the whole thing is of no further interest. There will be twenty lines in the paper to-night, and those twenty lines will be the same in every rag in Paris."

But there still remains Christ; men's indifference cannot annihilate Him. His official rejection by France, which forms the climax of the story, is carried out with all the cruel refinement of well-bred courtesy. There are no tauntings from soldiers, no mocking ceremonies of royalty, no thorn crowns; a cynical word politely spoken by smiling lips suffices.

The book is as extraordinary for its restraint as for its daring. It surprises as much by the things that it omits as by those that it includes. For instance, no word is said in criticism of any established form of government, religious or

secular. There is a reason for this: Christ addresses Himself to individuals and not to institutions.

The purpose of *The Re-Appearing* is to confront society not with Christ's teachings as academic theories, but with Christ Himself as an available means of life.

The story tells itself naturally, as a contemporary epic of the symbolised desire for righteousness. It is a mixture of drama and journalism, and it is the journalistic touch which gives it its extreme vividity. For eleven days Christ is visible in Paris, and eleven days of His actual presence in a Christian country are sufficient to re-enact in a modern way the tragedy which required three years for its accomplishment in Galilee. The climax of His rejection falls, significantly enough, on Christmas Day.

This is a wounding book—wounding as a surgeon's knife which pains to cure. It is as destructive of humanitarian cant as

it is of selfish sophistries. It is a keenly analytical criticism of our age and civilisation, and arrives at truth by the rough-paved road of satire. Allowance has to be made for the licence which is permitted to French literature in the treatment of all intellectual questions, religious or otherwise. *The Re-Appearing* must be read and judged as a French book, and not as an English translation.

The first impression that it is likely to make is of its amazing cleverness. It stimulates thought at every point and pushes back the horizons of the imagination. It may stir up anger, but it is the anger of awakened conscience. No one can read it without being roused to discussion, and no one can discuss it without coming to perceive that it contains more than mere cleverness—sincerity, penetrating insight and a sense of righteousness which is almost savage. The more one reflects upon it, the more inevitably just do its conclusions become. Its most ex-

traordinary quality is its convincing naturalness; we are compelled, perhaps against our wills, to recognise that did Christ appear in Paris to-day the attitudes of commerce and culture toward Him would be very much as Monsieur Morice states.

CONINGSBY DAWSON.

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THE RE-APPEARING

I

THE MODERN MIRACLE

AT the very same hour that morning, December 11th, every Parisian made the same grimace. They opened their eyes and mouths wide as they unfolded their newspapers and refolded them again. The back page of each was blank.

What did it mean? What could be the reason? Had every advertising contract in Paris been broken?

People flew into the streets and rushed to the newspaper kiosks. There were no newspapers left. All had been bought up at an early hour. The newspaper vendors were explaining to the crowd that they understood nothing at all about it, and kept on repeating that all the papers,

every one of them, from those which issued two million copies daily to those which appeared intermittently, had come out that morning with their back page blank, entirely blank.

People rushed to the newspaper offices. The commissionaires had received orders to let nobody in whom they did not know. They, like the newspaper vendors, could give no explanation.

Clever people who knew, or thought they knew something about newspaper management went off to question men of business and the shopkeepers, who the day before had paid their good money for the privilege of praising their products and their goods in print. Most of these capitalists admitted that they had no answer to give, and that they were as astonished as everybody else. A few of them, out of vanity, let it be understood that they knew the reason of the phenomenon, but that they had promised to say nothing. The crowd became so angry with them that

they soon regretted their unworthy subterfuge.

The patience of the Parisians, which is short, was rapidly disappearing.

At noon, the Bourse, where prices had been very bad for several weeks, underwent something of a crisis. Prices in all the markets dropped to a figure below any that had yet been quoted.

In the afternoon chattering and excited groups formed upon the boulevards. Everybody was impatiently waiting for the evening papers.

Will "it" be blank?

"It" was.

People rushed to the cafés earlier than usual that afternoon, and everybody had a newspaper. The curious asked questions of the curious. Strangers ran up to perfect strangers, showing them the blank back page of half a dozen different newspapers and arguing about them.

But not only was the back page of the evening papers blank.—There were blank

spaces in the advertisement columns on the other pages. This refinement of mystery exasperated the journalists. These men, professional pryers into secrets, were furious at being teased in this way on their own domain. Here was a question to which they had no answer for the waiting public. In fact, the question seemed unanswerable. And this evening there were more blank spaces in the newspapers than ever. Where would it stop? What would happen next? Would "the white sickness" eat up "the copy" after it had digested the advertisements?

At the *Poule d'Or* in the Rue Montmartre, where a number of reporters met each evening from six to eight, excitement was at its height. It could be measured by the unusually large piles of white saucers on the tables, for each white saucer meant another drink, and Frenchmen when excited need refreshment.

"We are all mad!" cried Larrivé, a tall, pale young man, who wore spectacles, and

whose pockets always bulged with scientific pamphlets which he bought from the tin boxes on the quays of the Seine. "We are all crazy. We see white as other people sometimes see red! This is some sort of suggestion! Some sort of collective illusion! The truth is that the pages are blackened with print as usual, because it is impossible that they should be anything else, but we don't see it. . . ."

"It is you who are crazy!" interrupted Crucol, flapping a copy of the *Révolution* in his comrade's face. "Do we see the other pages as blank? There is no illusion at all. Something extraordinary has happened. It is probably the first of a series of extraordinary happenings. Something or other is imminent."

"But somebody must be responsible for the series," said several men at once. "Who can it be?"

"Exactly, who?" muttered Crucol.

He wrinkled his narrow forehead, which no thought had ever wrinkled be-

fore, in a vain effort to discover something.

Then, throwing out his arms, he said:

"I give it up."

A little distance from them, with his elbows on the table and his head in his hands, sat Louis Narda, a journalist well-known and almost famous for the cleverness with which he unravelled newspaper mysteries. He sat and pondered. Larrivé pointed to him.

"Narda is also puzzling it out."

"He may have discovered something," said Edmond Peissier, a fat man who was always ready to follow up the ideas of other men. He crossed over to Narda's table.

"Well, my good sir," he asked in a tone of mingled deference and irony, "what are you thinking about?"

Narda made no reply. Peissier touched him on the shoulder. Narda jumped like a man awakened from a dream. He looked at Peissier for a mo-

ment without seeing him; then with a passionate gesture he shouted:

"Go to blazes!"

"You! Why, you don't mean to say that you've not cleared up the mystery!" exclaimed Peissier, in a tone of flattering astonishment.

"I'm trying to. Leave me alone!"

Peissier went back to the others.

"Whoever clears this thing up will make a fortune," said a newcomer, a tall, untidy man with long hair and a flat nose, whose name was Isidore Frène.

"How's that?" clamoured everyone at once.

"I'll tell you. The head sent for me just now."

"Baunu-Llavari?"

"He himself. 'Look here, Frène,' he said, *'L'Avant-l'Aube* must be the first paper to publish the truth. Whoever finds a clue can come to me for ten thousand francs, and there's a hundred thousand for the man who brings me the com-

plete story before two o'clock to-morrow morning.'"

"A hundred thousand francs!"

"Yes. And he added: 'Tell everybody in the office what I have said, and as it is quite possible that none of our staff may hit on the solution of the mystery, you may tell every journalist you see about my offer. It is open to every newspaper-man in Paris. And if the winner cares to do so he can come on to the staff of *L'Avant-l'Aube* at a salary of three thousand francs a month, with a ten years' contract.'"

"Good Lord!"

"That's my message," Frène concluded.

The café emptied immediately. The journalists rushed out, without waiting to make plans, eager to share in the campaign. On the pavement outside, Larrivé took hold of Crucol by the arm as he was signing to a taxi-cab.

"Look here, old man," he said. "Let's run this thing together, and if we clear it

up we can divide the spoils. I've got an idea."

"An hallucination? A suggestion? An illusion?"

"No. Better than that."

"All right, then. Speak out."

Larrivé, who was a much taller man than Crucol, bent down and whispered one word.

Crucol started, then thought awhile.

"Just possible," he said. "But surely it would ruin even him. It's true his country would refund the money it cost him. He would have shown his cleverness. . . . Well, jump into the cab, anyway. Perhaps you're right. Who can say? Prince Victor . . ."

"Keep your tongue quiet," said Larrivé. The two men drove off together to the German Embassy.

Meanwhile Narda, in the almost empty café, paid for his drink and strolled out. His eyes were shining with excitement. He, too, called a cab and told the driver

to hurry to the offices of the Confédération Générale du Travail—the famous C.G.T. or strike organisation.

"That's it," he muttered to himself, as the cab drove off. "That's where it comes from! The printers have refused to make up any new advertisements and have smashed up the old plates. The managers of the papers dare not tell the public what has happened. It's *sabotage*. Tapaud and Company again. But why? They won't tell me, but that doesn't matter. I can find out how they have done it; we'll find out why later on."

That night very few journalists went home to bed.

At about four in the morning at *Le Lapin Cru,* near the markets, Peissier and Narda came in by different doors at almost the same moment. They shook hands and sat down in silence at the same table. Narda, who was usually calm enough, was very nervous. He glanced

at his comrade, and his look clearly told him to be quiet. Then, with his elbows on the table in his favourite position, he leaned his head upon his hands. Peissier, who was something of a philosopher, sat back and smoked cigarettes.

The whole army of Paris reporters came in by ones and twos and groups of three and more. *Le Lapin Cru* was a very favourite haunt of theirs at night. It was there that they talked over the latest news, and the newsboys brought in the morning papers fresh from the press before they went down to the kiosks with them.

In a few minutes there was not a free table, not even an empty chair in the big café. The hum of conversation rose into a roar, a sort of angry symphony punctuated by the rapping of an occasional glass upon the wooden tables. All the men looked tired and disappointed. Larrivé, Crucol, and Frène were sitting

at the same table as Narda and Peissier.

"I don't mind telling you at once," said Frène, folding his arms and sitting back, "that I have found out absolutely nothing. What luck have you had, Narda?"

"There's nothing to find out," said he, lifting his big black head from his little white hands.

"What do you mean?"

"Too much for us," said Narda, accentuating each separate syllable. "Too much for us. See what I mean?"

"Can't say that I do," said Frène.

"Exactly. There's nothing to be understood. There's nothing to look for. It is there and it isn't!"

"That's what I said at *La Poule D'Or,*" cried Larrivé. "The page looks blank to us and it isn't blank at all, because it can't be blank."

"If you like. That's about what I think," returned Narda, smiling. "Though I must say that such an idea seems utterly ridiculous."

"It is just as ridiculous," said Larrivé, "to try to explain the impossible."

"You are both mad," exclaimed Peissier, banging the table with his fist. "You are mystic mad, the pair of you! Go and take a cold bath."

"You had better go to bed," said Narda, "or stop and think a bit, if you can think. We have all been trying to clear this thing up, and not one of us has hit upon the right clue. Everyone of us has asked himself: Who? Why? How? and these three questions remain unanswered. 'How' is as unanswerable as 'why' and 'who.' The printers don't know how the pages have come out of the rotaries without a mark on them, and the men in the composing rooms don't understand it either."

"Perhaps they won't say," hinted Crucol.

Narda shrugged his shoulders.

"What! Not one of them!" he said.

"That's the puzzle. There must be

someone pretty powerful behind this thing. Somebody or some group. It must have cost a trifle."

"A trifle!" echoed Narda, raising his voice. "Have you thought about what it must have cost? You may not know that all the advertisers have insisted upon payment of damages, and that they have all got their money. Can you calculate what that represents? Do you know anyone in the whole world, banker, oil-king, Crœsus, who could put such sums down on the table? For the papers have indemnified the advertisers, and they have not paid with their own money!"

"That's true," said Larrivé. "And the managers declare that though the money was deposited to their accounts, they don't know where it came from."

"Good Lord, who has done this thing?" shouted Frène. "Who?"

"As for me, I thought of Prince Victor first," said Larrivé. "It seemed a possibility. Crucol and I——"

"We had our trouble for nothing," Crucol interrupted. "My idea was the Kaiser, and there was nothing in that either."

"Well," said Narda, "I tried something else. My idea was the Socialists. The beggars who ride rough-shod over society and make themselves a perfect nuisance to us, for our own ultimate good. But I was wrong, like the rest of you."

A group had formed round Narda's table. He was very much esteemed by his fellow-journalists, not so much because of his cleverness and his professional success, as because of his personal worth. He was respected as a thinker and a man of letters, who had not realised his dream. He was known to have done a great deal of library work. Men said that he had drawers full of notes, half-written works on various subjects, novels and plans for novels, poems or bits of poems, essays, plays, and scenarios. His comrades thought a great deal of him, and expected

much, and newspaper owners had faith in his opinion. But these last words of his brought forth some protest.

"The working men are a force of Nature," someone said. "You had the right idea, Narda, but you set about it in the wrong way."

"Why?" he asked.

"Because, in your heart of hearts you hate the Socialists. We all know that. You are a reactionary at heart, and you can't expect the enemy to let you into their secret."

"Bravo," said Narda, laughing. "So you think that the proletariat, working together for once, is really going to triumph at last, thanks to the discipline which former strikes have taught them to be necessary? My dear Peissier, you are something of a mystic yourself. No," said Narda more seriously, "my idea would not hold water because a complete understanding among all the printers and com-

positors of Paris would be a miracle. I prefer to believe in——"

"In what?"

"For the moment," said Narda, without replying, "we must comfort ourselves with the thought——"

"That the papers of December 12th will be here in five minutes," interrupted Crucol, "and that we shall see for ourselves whether 'It' is blank again. We may even find the answer to the riddle in this morning's papers. So for the time being let's talk of something else. Who says a game of cards?"

Nobody fell in with Crucol's idea.

"We can only admit," said Narda, "that we are face to face with an inexplicable mystery. Crucol is right. We can only wait and see."

"Nothing is inexplicable," expostulated Larrivé, "science has taught us——"

Narda burst out laughing boisterously.

"I was waiting for that," he said. "I

even wondered why you were so long getting on your hobby horse. So in your opinion, science——"

"You can laugh as much as you like," said Larrivé. "Science is at the root of it."

"Explain yourself."

"Science must be at the root of it because it can't be anything else."

"Powerfully reasoned," commented Narda. "Perhaps you will explain how science intervened and what it did."

"You must ask the scientists."

"Haven't you done so? Perhaps we may hit on something while we are waiting for their solution. What do you say to radium?"

Larrivé's eyes flashed.

"I've thought of that," he said.

"Of course you have. Madame Curie has found means to produce radium at will whenever she likes, and she has begun to show the almighty power that her

discovery has given her by interfering with the ordinary course of commercial and public life. Simple, isn't it? Most ingenious! Your appetite for the supernatural is quite insatiable, Larrivé."

"Not at all. I'm trying to find a logical explanation and——"

"And any explanation will strike you as perfectly logical although you are quite incapable of understanding it, so long as it be given you in the name of science. You give science the credit which you would refuse to God."

"God," echoed Larrivé contemptuously. "There is only one God."

"I know," said Narda, taking a packet of cigarettes from his pocket, "and His name is science. Take a cigarette. Smoke and keep quiet."

At this moment every man leapt to his feet. The newsboys came in with their bundles of papers, damp with fresh ink, upon their shoulders. They were rushed

at and their papers torn from them. They gave them up without resistance and stood waiting to see the effect.

"Blank!"

"Good Lord, there are two of them!"

"Two blank pages!"

"And great blank spaces all over the others!"

"Whatever has been paid for has been cut out!"

The journalists were as white as those astounding white pages. They unfolded the papers wide, and stood staring at them, trembling with excitement, their eyes wide open with astonishment and a touch of fear.

"And not a word of explanation anywhere," said Peissier, who had run his eye over a number of papers. "They behave as though nothing had happened. 'Reconciliation of Jaurès and Briand.' 'Drought on the Seine.' 'Flight Ten Miles High.' . . . As though these were the things that mattered!"

"Mine is the only possible explanation," muttered Larrivé.

Narda suddenly, with an angry gesture, rolled his paper into a ball and threw it full into Larrivé's face. Then he sat down again without a word.

"Confound you," said Larrivé, rubbing his nose.

Narda sat thinking. His elbows were not upon the table as usual. He had thrown himself back on the seat with his thumbs tucked into the arm-holes of his waistcoat, and his eyes looked unseeing across the room. Little by little his gaze concentrated and fixed itself on the table opposite, while his face assumed an indefinable expression of calm and content. About six yards away from him, at the table opposite, a man was seated by himself. Narda stared at him. There was really nothing remarkable about this man except, perhaps, just that—that there was nothing particular to be said about him.

He was not in any way unusual. He

was very handsome, but his beauty was in no way astonishing. If he had not been handsome one would have been surprised at it, astounded that he was not so. His beauty consisted in the perfect equilibrium of everything about him. Its total impression was magnificently commonplace. It had to be. It was made necessary by the sovereign, ineffable serenity of soul which shone from this man's eyes, with a constant, steady intensity of light which outshone the glitter of the electric lamps and faded into a golden mist round the fair hair, which he wore rather long. This light in the stranger's eyes did not dazzle Narda. He felt in some way that it lit up his inner consciousness. And he sat looking at the unknown with a sympathy in which there was both confidence and deference. He had no wish to go and speak to him or question him. He was fully satisfied by the mere fact of his presence, his real physical presence.

"That is a real man," he said to him-

self, "not a puppet, like the other fellows and myself. But how long has he been here?" He didn't remember seeing him come in. Of course there was nothing extraordinary in the fact that the stranger should have passed unnoticed in the excitement of the moment and the discussions which had been going on. The main thing was that he was there.

No, he didn't want to ask him any questions. The mere fact that he showed no uneasiness made it perfectly clear that there was no reason for uneasiness, that everything would shortly be explained, and that the explanation would be marvellously simple.

Correcting his frame of mind in accordance with a sentiment that was not at all familiar to him, Narda cast a look of pity at the excited group of brother journalists. He had not noticed their chatter for several minutes. The noise of it had been blotted out as though a door had been closed between him and them. Sud-

denly he heard it again. They were still talking vehemently about nothing, and Narda heard Frène, in his squeaky voice, made the more piercing by annoyance, sleeplessness, and drink, saying,

"You are all wrong. I have hit upon the secret. It is an advertisement."

"What?"

"Yes. In a few days' time you will see in red letters upon these blank pages the words: *'Excelsissimus!* An Illustrated Paper appearing Twice a Day at Five Centimes, with Fifty or a Hundred Pages of Text and Five Square Yards of Pictures!' Don't you see? It is a newspaper trust. The managers of all the newspapers are working hand in hand. Llavari was simply playing the fool with me."

"H'm," said Crucol, thoughtfully, "that's not a bad idea. It's not impossible."

Peissier protested.

"Rubbish. An understanding of that

kind is even more unlikely among newspaper proprietors than among the printers. This is not a trust of newspapers. It is their death. It is our death! White leprosy!"

"The white terror," said Crucol.

For just one moment Narda had the idea of drawing his comrades' attention to the stranger, whom none of them seemed to have noticed. But as the thought crossed his mind the stranger got up. Had he guessed Narda's intention? Did he want to dissuade him? His gaze, calm and luminous, rested a moment on the journalist's eyes, and Narda could have sworn that in that gaze he gave him an appointment for the morrow at the same hour in the same place. Involuntarily he made a gesture of assent, of which the stranger took no notice. He put a large round felt hat upon his head, threw a great black cloak about his shoulders, and went out without paying the slightest attention either to the people

present or to what they were saying or doing.

When he had gone the tavern seemed quite empty to Narda. In his turn he took down his hat and coat from the rack, and went away without vouchsafing a reply to the questions of the other journalists, who were all astonished that he no longer shared their agitation.

A few hours later Paris went distracted. There were significant symptoms of distress on the Bourse. There was no business doing. The oldest *agent de change* or sworn broker on the Bourse had never seen anything like it in all his experience. Men with stock to sell and buy, who as a rule make such an uproar on the steps of the Bourse from twelve to three, were silent, and from the top of the steps this still and mournful crowd contrasted curiously with the uneasy crowd below on the big square, which was excitedly gesticulating and shouting.

Meanwhile, serious rioting was in progress at Montmartre. For no definite reason that anybody could suggest, popular opinion had insisted that the Monarchists were responsible for what was happening. The mob in Paris is always prone to the simplest symbolism, and people saw in this extraordinary transformation of the newspapers of all shades of political opinion into white flags proof of a plot which outstripped the pretensions of a Duke of Orleans. There was talk in the crowd of a descendant of Henry V. Rumours were spread that a Spanish Bourbon, who declared himself the heir by marriage of the Count de Chambord, was offering himself to France as the necessary man, the providential saviour of the country, the only master who was capable of restoring order definitely in a country which syndical revolt had stirred unceasingly.

The minds of the people were terribly excited by this perspective of a stranger's usurpation of the throne. Although the

Republic had until then failed to please many, it became dear to all at the first sign of danger, and the loyal ardour of the Republicans was made clear on the unfortunate attempt of the camelots of the king to take advantage of the excitement which prevailed.

These young men, hoping to exploit the general uneasiness to the Pretender's advantage, had organised a big meeting in Montmartre, at which the question was put: "Has not the present constitution lasted too long?" The meeting was attended by the two opposing crowds of reactionaries and Socialists, and there was bloodshed. A huge force of police surrounded the combatants, who suddenly made common cause and turned on the police. The Republican Guard had to be called out, as well as two squadrons of the Paris garrison. The battle lasted three whole hours. There were eleven hundred and thirteen arrests, an enormous

number were wounded, and twelve men killed.

But when the evening papers appeared, three-quarters of the sheets were blank. The prefect of police had the happy idea of ordering thousands of the papers to be thrown into the middle of the crowd. Life-protectors, sticks and revolvers dropped spontaneously from hands which reached out for the papers, and the shrieks of hatred and of rage died away in gasps of astonishment at the sight of these newspapers with their blank pages. A deep silence fell over Paris.

Nobody questioned his neighbour, for everyone recognised that all were equally ignorant. They each waited, prepared for almost anything to happen.

That night the journalists met as usual at *Le Lapin Cru*. They were worn out, feverish, and weary, for they had spent two sleepless nights and days.

In this group of men who were at one moment excited and agitated, and at another deadly dull, Narda alone was at peace, and almost cheerful. This irritated his companions.

"You've managed to get some sleep, haven't you?"

"You've found out something!"

"Why don't you speak?"

He could not. He could not tell them. Since the previous day a gulf divided him from this artificial world, where a few hours ago he bustled and scrambled and hurried here and there, as his companions were hurrying and scrambling still. Into this great gulf the last five or six years of his life had fallen, and they had been forgotten as though they had never existed. On the other hand, his earlier years, those of his early youth and of his childhood, had graven themselves on the tablets of his memory in curiously rich and living colours. He was once more a lad in love with the heroic charm of life, planning

the programme of a life worth living, and of a sudden, Verlaine's lovely line leapt out of his youth like a perfumed breath:

"L'enfance baptismale émerge du pécheur." [1]

It seemed to him as though he were about to reconquer the naïve triumph of his childhood, and by reconquering it to become, in the sweet words of the Bible, "worthy to enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

He felt no impatience. In a sort of happy vigil he was enjoying a delicious foretaste of perfect happiness, enjoying it with perfect confidence. He had come to the trysting place. He knew that the Other Man would be punctual. He did not even glance up at the time, though the least motion of his head would have shown him the clock, which he knew to be on the wall at his right. He remembered with a smile how often during long

[1] "Out from the sinner's soul springs the child's innocence."

nights of waiting he had accused that old Swiss clock of counting the minutes all too slowly. Time now had lost its hold upon him.

All of a sudden there was a hubbub outside. The doors slammed open and closed again, and the newsboys came rushing in with the papers. But when they were inside the café they remained motionless. Their eyes were fixed, and they were glittering and staring. Every one of them was mortally pale, and the expression of real tragedy upon the poor little faces of these Parisian night birds was so unusual, so out of all proportion, that the journalists sat and stared at them in turn.

At last one of the newsboys spoke.

"He has come!" he said.

"Who? What has come?" asked Frène.

"Jesus Christ."

"Eh, what? What are you talking about?"

The journalists made a mad rush for the papers. They were blank.

This time, they were entirely blank, except for the title on the front page; but on the last page, on the right-hand top side of the sheet, were a few lines printed in small letters. These read:—

> "The Son of God has no need of advertisement. He is staying at *L'Hôtel des Trois Rois* on *La Place de l'Etoile*. He will receive, from midday to midday, all day long, this 14th of December and to-morrow."

Every man read this to himself, then read it again, then read it over a third time. And for some moments there was no sound in the café but the rustling of the damp sheets in the trembling hands of the journalists.

One by one the men looked up from their papers, looked up from these distracting words, and glanced at one an-

other. Their eyes asked questions to which questions were the only answer. The newsboys watched the journalists staring at one another, waited for them to speak, and as they remained silent their stupefaction reacted on the lads.

"We are forgetting our work," said one of them.

"So are we," cried Crucol, coming to himself with a start. "I'm off to *La Place de l'Etoile.*"

"So are we! So are we!" And they rushed to the doors.

"Come on!" cried one of the newsboys. He slapped the flat of his hand on what remained of his bundle of papers.

"To-day this is minted gold," he said. "An article, perhaps, by Jesus Himself! I shan't take less than a franc for a paper to-day. Is it a deal?"

"Right!" shouted the others.

II

AT L'HÔTEL DES TROIS ROIS

NARDA had watched the journalists and newsboys start up out of the café without seeing them. He was quite alone in the tavern, which had been so full and so noisy a few moments before. The blank sheets of paper which the journalists had thrown down in their hurry were scattered about the floor, and Narda was absorbed in his dreams, quite indifferent to the hour and place and to what had happened.

Surprised at seeing him sitting there, the manager went up to him, carrying a paper in his hand.

"Monsieur Narda," he said.

Narda raised his head.

"Haven't you seen this?" showing him the paper.

"No," said Narda carelessly. "Is there any news?"

"News?" cried the manager. "Look!"

Narda looked at the paper, saw that it was blank, and gave it back without showing the least surprise.

"Gracious me! Are you blind?" And the manager pointed to the three lines on the back page.

"Queer," said Narda in a tone which showed that he wanted to be left alone. And he pushed the paper from him without looking at it.

The manager gasped with astonishment. The paper fell from his hands on to the table, making a sort of screen between Narda and the table opposite. Then as it fell and Narda looked across the room he got up, and pushed past the manager. It would not be enough to say that the man moved aside. He disappeared. He vanished. He was gone altogether when Narda found himself sitting beside *The Man* on the dingy seat of *Le Lapin Cru.*

They began to talk.

"Lord, I thought you would have returned in some other manner."

Jesus replied:

"Have you, too, no understanding? Visible or invisible, the Son of Man returns every day."

"And if He show himself to mortal eyes to-day, is it with an intention which He will allow us to understand? No doubt He comes to finish——"

Narda broke off, seeing that Jesus smiled. He understood, without being told, that Jesus was smiling at the question which he had not yet finished. And he felt a moment's annoyance that what he meant to say had been guessed before he said it.

"So we are not to chat?" he said.

"Men do not chat with Me," said Jesus.

Narda bowed his head.

"However, for the sake of the readers to whom you will report My answers, I

will permit you, as at this same moment I am permitting your comrades, to ask Me questions."

"As you are permitting my comrades?" repeated Narda in astonishment.

"Do you not know that they have gone to interview Me at *L'Hôtel des Trois Rois?*"

A deep wrinkle of disappointment formed on Narda's forehead.

Jesus smiled again, and in accents of infinite tenderness, replying to the young man's thoughts, He said:

"Yes, child. But I am all yours just the same. I am with you as you understand Me. Just as I am with each one of them according to their comprehension."

"My Lord and my God," whispered Narda, clasping his hands.

Then resuming the sentence he had begun:

"You have come, no doubt, to finish the work You had begun two thousand years ago?"

"The work is finished for all eternity."

"Then," cried Narda, in sudden excitement, "why did You not conquer?"

"Because I wished to leave you the merit of the conquest."

"But why do Your own people betray You? Why did the doctors deny one another and deny You?"

"Are the decisions of the Academy of Science any more certain or any clearer than those of the doctors?"

"Why are Your gospels all apocryphal?"

"Whose are the human masterpieces and the great inventions? Whose, for instance, are the poems of Homer? Is it not wiser to give your understanding to the enjoyment of the work than to search for the name of the author? You have already forgotten the names of the great lawyers who drew up your legal code. You call it the 'Code Napoleon.' In the same way you have the Gospel of Jesus. Does it matter who wrote it down? Be-

gin by comprehending it. When you read your legal code you look in it for the meaning of the legislator. When you read My Gospel ask yourself what is the doctrine of the Saviour. Do not pause at the letter which killeth. The spirit alone quickeneth. Would you not reproach Me if I had given you peremptory proof of authenticity? I should have reduced your reason to servitude and your adoration would be that of a slave. I have left your faith its merit. I have left you an excuse for doubt, and do you complain?"

"Lord, perhaps You are merely myself —myself made perfect."

"One of you has said, 'there is no God but man.' Those of you who expect to see in Me man made perfect, surely admit something even more inconceivable than divinity itself. How do you know that I have not raised Myself step by step from the principle of man to divine reality? How do you know that My church is not My divinity? Let it suf-

fice for Me to be thy God. Let it suffice that thou believest in Me. Know only whether thou canst conciliate thy spiritual loyalty with thy faith in Me. If thou canst, what dost thou forgo? Dost thou forgo eternal hope or thine own esteem?"

"Lord, Thou temptest me."

As he spoke the words, Narda thought, "Must God not make Himself Beelzebub to please the men of this miserable generation?"

"You discuss My parables. You pretend to find My doctrine in the doctrine of the philosophers who came before Me."

Suddenly the voice of Jesus thundered.

"And who came before Me? The only light in the dreams of the philosophers is My eternal light. I have expunged their vain dreams from out of My gospel, and My light remains."

"Lord, why is Your law so hard?"

"The law of the flesh is harder than

Mine, and well you know it. Is the law of the rich not harder, and the law of the strong? You utter words and hope that their noise may hide the emptiness of your spirit. Do you know the secret of your own desire? . . ."

"Lord, in the whole of Your gospel the word beauty is not mentioned once."

"In the whole of your code is the word love mentioned once? And yet if law be not founded on the love of man, one for another, is it the law? In the same way beauty is the sign of My presence, but this sign is manifest, and I have not created man to be blind. It is only the philosophers and æsthetes, men of vanity, who babble without shame of love and beauty. I have not come for the æsthetes and the philosophers. Speak less of beauty. Multiply it by love."

"Lord, read the thought which I dare not express to You."

"Be it so. My childlike and primitive gospel is repugnant to modern delicacy.

It is out-dated. Have you noticed that, such as it is, it is of passionate interest to the most delicate, the most refined poets, artists, and thinkers of your day?"

"'Tis true. You are the fashion," murmured Narda.

"You forget that you will be called upon to render an account of all the idle words that fall from your lips," said Jesus severely.

Then more gently:

"The uncultured treat Me as primitive. The exegetics deny Me. The wits jeer at Me for an uncouth miracle-worker. But verily I say unto you, the ignorant and the learned would be equally insensible to a modern version of My law, to a modern setting forth of My divinity."

So, with the cordiality of children Jesus and His new disciple talked and sought wisdom together. Now and again Narda asked himself, "Am I not talking to myself? Is it not I alone who

am asking questions and giving the answers?"

Meanwhile, at *L'Hôtel des Trois Rois,* in which there are three hundred rooms, Jesus was receiving privately and at one and the same time, three hundred interviewers. Each one of them, delighted at not having been kept waiting, believed himself to be specially favoured, and while flattering himself that his own merit was the reason of this privilege, felt that the august Personage who was receiving him had already, by His perspicacity, half proved His divinity.

The public learned the result of these three hundred interviews in the evening papers of the 14th December, and more fully in the morning papers of the next day. For the Press had recovered its eloquence. The curious discomfort of the last few days had resulted in a freshness and spontaneity of expression. The public showed passionate interest in these

newspaper stories, all of which were spun out at great length, for the story was the story of the day. They were all extremely well written, and their work was not due only to the reflection of divine light that was in them. The journalists had surpassed themselves, because unconsciously each one of them had drawn a portrait of himself in colours of glory. For Jesus had appeared to each of the journalists as a corrected and perfected image of himself. There is nothing new in the procedure, and I am not sure that the reason of the charm which is to be found in the admirable lyric effusions of the great mystics is not based upon confusion of the same kind. The believer realises and sees his God according to his own strength and his own powers. This subjective action of piety is to be found as a principle in every religion, and until man loses himself and becomes absorbed in God, God is absorbed in man.

For these reasons the reporters found

sympathetic words and tender metaphors to describe Jesus, and found them without difficulty. Their enthusiasm was sincere and communicative. The people of Paris bought up the papers, and not waiting to get home to read them, devoured these masterpieces in the street under the driving snow, by the light of the gas and the electric lamps.

The readers who, anxious to learn fresh details, compared the articles in several papers, were not a little surprised to find considerable divergencies in fact, ideas, and words. In *La Feuille* the hair of Jesus was described as fair. He was dark in *La Petite Feuille*. He was red in *Paris Feuille*. His hair was black in *L'Avant-l'Aube,* and grey in *La Gaule*. There were the same differences of opinion with regard to His face, His clothes, and what He said. His bearing was described as that of an elegant Bohemian, something like the painter Carolus-Duran, twenty years before he went to the

Villa Médicis. It was described as that of a carefully and well-dressed man, as successful artists and poets usually are nowadays; as that of a German philosopher with rugged features; as that of a handsome tenor from Toulouse; as that of a Protestant clergyman, as Frenchmen understand him; as that of a warrior, with long hair and beard; or, this occurred most frequently, as that of one of the little figures of Christ which are to be seen on sale in the shops near the Church of St. Sulpice.

The comparison of what He had said in the different papers made His words seem altogether incoherent, for He was made here to praise and there to blame the same people and the same acts. He was made to announce peace, war, the end of the world, the age of gold, and always with the same categorical assurance that one expects from a Sovereign Lord.

People did not waste much time in pausing over these contradictions. In

every heart was the unanimous wish to see and know Him as He was, and from every point of Paris the crowd made for *La Place de l'Etoile.* A flood of human beings poured up there with a rush such as has never been seen before, and never will be seen again. This immense crowd of pilgrims was in a fever of excitement. They did not walk. They ran. Old men and young men, citizens and their wives and daughters, of all ages and all walks in life, all ran toward *L'Hôtel des Trois Rois.*

But when they came to *La Place de l'Etoile* the crowd of thousands who had got there first had made a moving wall, which the new-comers could not pass. The police worked hard, but worked in vain to restore order, and the confusion was indescribable.

Someone in the crowd had an idea. Who it was nobody knows.

"If it be really He, why doesn't He restore order?"

At the same moment, as if He had heard the words spoken, He appeared on the balcony of *L'Hôtel des Trois Rois* and made a sign. Immediately, without a moment's hesitation, the immense crowd moved on harmoniously and quietly, and, in perfect order, marched past beneath the balcony from which Jesus blessed the people as they passed Him. The crowd numbered millions.

When Monsieur Noah, who had come from America to teach Parisians how to organise their traffic, learned of this miracle, he said the same words which had been uttered a few hours before by Monsieur Baunu-Llavari, the manager of the *L'Avant-l'Aube*. He had read in his paper the announcement of Christ's arrival. "I believe in God," he said.

The joyful crowds, when they left *La Place de l'Etoile,* rushed to the taverns and the cafés to testify to God's glory. They suddenly remembered the hymns and canticles of their childhood—this

was another miracle—and sang them turn about with the Marseillaise and Internationale. They drank, they danced, they sang. Rejoicing went on all through the night. It was an improvised festival of the 14th of July, the only things missing being the roundabouts, shooting booths, and fat women, which are the essential accessories of every really popular festival. But the next day these were missing no longer.

Jesus, as He had promised, was at the disposal of all who came to Him, and He received a multitude of visitors. They arrived by special trains from the most distant parts of France, and even from abroad. Most of them, and this shows pretty clearly the state of mind of our contemporaries, most of them came not so much to consult Him, to see Him, and to hear His doctrine, as to make business proposals to Him. Or at all events the

people with proposals were the first to come and the first to be received.

After them came those of anxious hearts who wanted to know what codicil Jesus was going to add to the New Testament. People poured in during the whole afternoon of the 15th. In the morning Jesus received the business men first of all.

The most remarkable of them was a professional showman, an *impresario* known the whole world over, particularly in North and South America. He came to ask Jesus to allow him to "make up a company and organise a tour." He was an expert, he said. He brought references with him. He boasted of what he had done before, and declared that there was no doubt of success.

"We shall make millions," he declared.

Jesus listened and looked at him sadly and in silence. The showman, whose mind was full of his money-making plans,

went on talking ceaselessly. "The first thing to be done is to make up the twelve apostles. Judas will be our chief difficulty, for unfortunately Renan is dead, and those who take his place nowadays have no authority. That doesn't matter, however. We shall find somebody. I have done harder things than that, and of course You are going to begin all over again. Believe me, it would be a mistake to waste too much time over preliminaries. The Temptation will be without popular interest, for there is no desert now in which to go and fast. We must hurry on to the Passion. Where shall it be, to start with? Why not in Paris? It would be ever so much better than Oberammergaü. . . ."

Jesus let him talk.

There were people there who had not yet mentioned their names, and who had been introduced at once because all the ante-rooms were filled. There were a number of journalists there, too, who

were busily taking notes. Jesus turned away from the showman and looked at these spectators of this sacrilegious comedy, studying on their faces the impression it had made upon them. Not one of them manifested the horror which he ought to have felt. Even Narda was interested by the insolent volubility of this abominable mountebank, and Crucol was laughing.

When Jesus saw that His truth did not shine in a single one of these poor brains, He sighed and raised His hand. The showman disappeared.

His place was taken immediately by a rich contractor, who offered Jesus the management of the carpentry works in his business. "That was Your trade at one time, wasn't it?"

A well-known dramatic author came to solicit the collaboration of the Saviour in a play which the Théâtre Français had accepted in advance, a play of the highest morality which would certainly re-

main in the repertory. It was to be called *L'Esperance et la Charité.*

The painter, Bonnat, came to propose that he should paint the portrait of Jesus.

"As You know," he said, "I am the official portrait-painter of the President of the Republic and of the Cardinals. I hope You will take Your place in such good company."

But I have not the pretension to enumerate all the people who came to trouble Jesus, nor will I attempt to report all the more or less foolish speeches to which He had to listen that morning. He made no reply to anyone. When they had spoken, these people went off of their own accord, dismissed, turned away by a mere look.

Monsieur Jaurès was the only man who obtained an answer, and that was a quotation from the old gospel. The honourable deputy, in a brilliantly improvised speech, which the evening papers reproduced in extenso, begged Jesus to

declare Himself openly favourable to the claims of the unfortunate working men who were exploited by shameless capitalists. Jesus said to him:

"The poor ye have always with you."

Thereupon a young woman of rare beauty drew from her pocket a little phial full of a very precious and most expensive perfume, and sprinkling it to the last drop on the feet of the Saviour, begged Him to let her play the part of Mary Magdalene.

In the afternoon, visitors of another kind presented themselves. They came for information. They were greedy to know the plans of the Messiah. They questioned Him ceaselessly, their questions coming one after the other without waiting for replies, and in their voice was a distant echo of the voice of Pilate and the voices of the Pharisees.

"Are You really the Son of God?"

"Are You the King of the Jews?"

"Do You come to reconcile them?"

"Do You again bring fire and war?"

"Will You once more refuse to be our judge in the questions which divide us?"

"Do You come once more to exhort us to be penitent?"

"Will You repeat once more that salvation is difficult for those that have riches?"

"Have You come to drive the money-lenders from the Temple a second time?"

"Have You come to announce the last Judgment?"

"Will You be crucified again?"

"Will You tell us the Truth?"

"Will You show us the Way?"

"Will You teach us the Life?"

The questions became more numerous, more pressing and more passionate. They rose into a moan of agony.

"Shall we at last be told?"

"Have we come to the end of the agony from which the world has suffered since its beginning?"

"Will You tell us the Way, the Truth, and the Life?"

"Is it indeed You?"

Jesus listened. His eyes shone with a light of ineffable sadness.

Suddenly one of the questioners, speaking louder than the others, caused them to be silent. His words were mingled with outcries and sobs and tears.

"Have pity! Speak to us clearly, and do not allow us any longer not to hear You. Lord, we are dying! Oh, Almighty! who can save us, open our minds and touch our hearts. Master, we want a sign from You! A sign glorious, incontestable, self-evident, which shall oblige us to believe in You. We want . . ."

The words died suddenly on the imploring lips, and a shudder of fear shook all present, for the flame of a terrible anger burned in the eyes of Jesus.

"Wicked and adulterous generation," He said, "you ask for a sign and no sign

shall be given you. Your wish condemns you, for it shows your vanity, your sloth and your hardness of heart. You ask for a sign. Your wish proves your definite decay, for you ask me to reduce your minds to slavery. You feel yourselves unworthy to believe, incapable of deserving certainty, and all you want is that I should believe for you. But I can no more believe for you than the master can have knowledge for his pupil, or than the wife can love for her husband. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. The truth cannot be taught. It must be discovered in the words which contain it, and beyond them, in the words which enwrap and hide it. That is why the God of the Gospels spoke in parables. He spoke to the intelligence and the sincerity of man. You want the truth to be imposed upon you. You refuse to make the necessary effort for its acquisition, and you will not believe until it has be-

come impossible for you to deny the evidence. You do not ask your understanding to testify to this evidence. You wish your senses to do so. You want to receive truth, not to look for it, to receive it as a material ray of light, as a rush of wind or as a clap of thunder. Hypocritical and cowardly generation! Not one of you shall possess the truth unless he has thought, in his heart, with all his strength. You wish to take the truth with your hands, to see it with your eyes. You have no confidence in your soul because you know that falsehood lives in it. You are like a man who, having been betrayed in his house by his wife and his children and by his servants, goes out upon the high road to beg his salvation of strangers. But strangers will betray him too."

"You at least," said he who had asked for the sign, "You, Lord, do not deceive us. You do not tempt us. Do not re-

fuse us the miracle which will awaken our conscience. In Judea You cured the sick, You raised the dead——"

"Are you quite sure?" asked Jesus in a voice so distant, so far off, that everybody present asked his heart whether it was He who had spoken, or whether the question had formed itself in the secret recesses of each man's own mind.

He spoke again:

"Oh, ye of little faith! Corozain, Bethsaida and Capharnaum saw My miracles and did not believe. All is vanity. The miracles of God and words from His Kingdom are vanity for those who do not see and do not listen with their understanding. Satan comes and steals away the seed which has been sown in careless hearts. And you who wish to recognise Me by a word and by a sign which raised the dead, you will listen with your ears and you will not hear. You will gaze with your eyes and you will not see, if at first you do not believe.

If you believe, you yourselves will perform miracles. You will command the mountains to cast themselves into the sea, and they will obey you."

A deep groan sprang from every breast. Men sobbed, and, in their sobbing, words were muttered. "The parable of merit and of mercy once again. You ask too much of man. If You do not bring us more mercy than this You might as well have remained in Your Heaven."

And they went off weeping with pain, and Jesus looked at them inexorably as they went.

Narda, who had not left the Hotel since the morning, followed them. In his heart of hearts he did not approve the implacability of Jesus. "Why did He refuse the sign for which He had been asked? Why would He not give again, as He gave in the days of Herod, proofs of His mission? The blind see, the halt walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear,

the dead are raised up. Would it not have been interesting if He had re-arranged with modern conditions the principal scenes in the old Gospel, multiplying the loaves in the plain of St. Denis, walking on the waters of the Seine, and making a triumphal entry into Versailles, opening the eyes of the blind, and giving hearing to the deaf? Of course, had He consented to do these things, He might have got Himself into trouble with the authorities for the illegal practice of medicine. Perhaps the enthusiasm of the crowds for His presence would have made the Government uneasy. Then there would have been a trial before the High Court, and the Passion would have begun once more in a new and modern way."

At this point Narda trembled. He had just remembered the words of the vile-minded showman, "Of course, you are going to begin again." He was ashamed of himself. Was it possible

that his thought had anything in common with the thoughts of such a man?

No, Jesus did not intend to repeat, as an actor plays his part, the acts and the sayings of the Gospels. Jesus had not come to begin His work again or to finish it. Had He not Himself told Narda that His work had been finished for all eternity? And of a sudden these words acquired a meaning which Narda had not yet understood. This work, finished for all eternity, filled all eternity, and would last as long as the centuries. It would always be modern, always new, and always real. It fitted itself now to the modern circumstances of life, and that was why Jesus no longer performed the old-fashioned miracles, and why new miracles of a new kind must be expected from Him.

III

"LAZARUS, COME FORTH!"

THE young girl was trembling. With a smile Jesus reassured her, and signed to her to come near.

"What do you want of Me?" He asked.

"Lord," implored Marie, falling on her knees, "those whom I love are in danger of death, and I have come to You to beg You to save them."

"Why? If I were able to save them should I leave them in danger of death?"

"To show Your almighty power by saving them. Truly, those whom I love are not themselves in fear of death, but it would be better for them that they should be dead, that they should die while life was in them, than that they should remain alive while there is no longer any life in them."

"I know," said Jesus.

"Lord," said Marie again, "if You had remained with them my brother and my sister had not died."

Jesus went with Marie.

She took Him to a sumptuous house in the Champs Elysées, an immense, magnificently furnished cube of buildings, the very aspect of which showed the spiritual indigence of those who lived there. Yet in the world's judgment these people were happy. Numbers of men and women called on them to ask help of all kinds, and felt honoured by the mere fact of asking for their good graces. They had numbers of friends, or at any rate numbers of people pretended to be their friends. These were poor, too, so painfully poor, in such despair at their distress that they did not even recognise it, and did not weep and gnash their teeth, but were condemned to wear an eternal smile.

Often they visited and smiled in one another's houses, trying in the vacuum of

their consciences to make time pass by means of rich living, by exchanging words of doubtful wit, by gambling, and by every form of vice.

That morning they had gone to smile at the house of the brother and sister-in-law of Marie. They were smiling sadly. There was a great luncheon forward, a banquet, as were all the luncheons every day in that poor world. And the rooms were filled with charming women and good-looking men, who smiled at one another inconsolably.

In spite of the rich perfumes of those present, Jesus, as he entered, felt the odour of death in his heart, and going straight up to the master and the mistress of the house, said to them:

"What have ye done with it?"

They did not understand His words, but the voice, the look, the tone of His voice made them fearful. His presence awoke in their hearts old feelings, awoke in them, again, their dying soul. They

understood, at all events, that in these words there was something to be understood. They did not dare to question Jesus, but they turned to Marie.

"He speaks to you," she said, "of that which is no more, of the death which is the reason that there is no longer any life in you."

Then her brother and her sister-in-law trembled in every limb, for they understood that Jesus spoke of their love which they had quite forgotten, and which had died. They began suddenly to regret it, and they exchanged a rapid look, in which there was reproach and remorse. But at the same moment the husband grew pale and the wife blushed, for they feared that their feelings must have been guessed by their Visitor.

"What have ye done with it?" Jesus repeated.

He raised His hand and pointed to the heavy luxury of the room, to the luxurious dresses of the women, and to their

empty faces, and to the empty faces of the men who were with them. And pointing even further, His finger showed the offices in which business of high importance was transacted, the workrooms and the factories where men toiled for their masters and for all that which means power, ambition, pleasures, amusements, and vices. It was under these things that these unhappy people had buried their hearts, in them that they had forgotten their life.

Jesus spoke again.

"What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his soul?"

The husband, caring nothing for those who were present, burst into tears, and kissed his wife, while Marie embraced the knees of the Saviour.

The guests looked at this scene with deep emotion, for they felt their own souls and their own love revived within them.

The odour of death had disappeared. The spirit of life was alive in the air.

All that day, December 16th, and on all the days which followed until Saturday the 24th, inexplicable things happened in the town-halls of the twenty parishes of Paris where marriages are celebrated.

In more than sixty cases out of every hundred, when the mayor asked the bride and bridegroom if they would take one another to be man and wife, he received, sometimes from the bridegroom, but more often from the bride, the answer "No," spoken in clear and decided tones.

When the astonished mayor thought that he had misunderstood the answer, and repeated his question, the brides and bridegrooms threw on to the green table, which is the altar of the civil marriage ceremony, their wedding rings which they had twisted off their fingers.

According to his nature, the bride-

groom whom his bride had put away before the marriage burst into reproaches, into bitter complaints, or tears; shouted with angry indignation, or begged her to reconsider her reply, but always in vain. Sometimes it was the bride who stormed or pleaded. The other party always refused to reconsider his or her "No," and "No" was his or her last word.

It must be said that commonsense, nature and virtue were in full agreement with these negatives. For in every case the union was a disproportionate one. Disproportionate either because of the conditions of the marriage and the temperament of bride and bridegroom, or of their ages. A beautiful and poor young girl refused to marry a rich old man. This was the most usual case. But there were examples, too, of young men who refused to marry elderly dowagers with fat purses.

The extraordinary thing about these refusals was that they were always made

at the last moment. The fathers and mothers-in-law complained bitterly in every case that they ought to have been spared the shame and the pain of this insult.

"Why," they said, "should things have been allowed to go so far, and then at the last moment . . ."

In every case the bride or bridegroom who refused to marry declared that their determination had been as sudden as it was irresistible. Each one of them declared that "yes" had been the word upon their lips as they had crossed the threshold of the town-hall, "but when the mayor asked the question it was more than I could resist."

Some of them even said:

"I had opened my mouth to say, 'Yes,' when I saw behind the mayor a Man, a handsome and sad Man, looking at me. And His gaze made the lie impossible."

Nobody could mistake the Personality referred to, and it was these little family

dramas that caused the first use of the word "inconvenient," with reference to the presence of Jesus in Paris.

The mayors tried to keep Him out of the town-halls, and had the doors carefully guarded on the days when marriages were celebrated. Numbers of well-known and respected people were obliged to show their papers at the weddings of their sons and daughters to prove that they were not the Saviour. But He was always present, and always passed in unseen.

From the third day onwards He need not have troubled. The peculiar probity, which made all unmarried persons refuse to profane the sacrament of marriage by an assent which was contrary to their real wish, had become a fever, an illness, a mania, an epidemic, like suicide or murder.

Engaged couples who hoped for no happiness from a marriage which had been arranged by foolish or greedy rela-

tives, realised their liberty of action at the decisive moment. They realised their dignity, and proudly, gaily, brightly spoke the "No" which set them free.

There were no more of these ill-assorted unions which a third person inevitably breaks. The number of marriages diminished, no doubt, because imposture no longer swelled the tale, but all the marriages which did take place were so charming, so delightful, that the scientists who investigated the laws regulating the structure of society, announced a coming increase in the Paris birth-rate.

On the 14th December a popular festival had begun almost of its own accord, and this went on with great success, in spite of circumstances which might have hindered it. For there had been a most unusual falling off of business on the Bourse for several weeks, and this had become more accentuated every day, bringing in its wake the ruin of the ma-

jority of the big business firms in Paris. General business had come practically to a standstill.

The result of this was lamentable misery in the poorer districts, and under the circumstances the misery was irremediable.

How, in such circumstances, could the working classes, workers who had become honest and honourable citizens since their pilgrimage to *La Place de l'Etoile,* forget their wives and children who were starving, in riotous festival in fairs and taverns?

The explanation of the mystery was not supernatural intervention. The intervention came from above, but not from Heaven. The Government and the Municipal Council, growing uneasy at the march of events, feared that the worst kind of riot, an uprising of hungry men, would complicate the financial crisis. For this reason they had distributed, in secret, large sums of money among the

publicans and café proprietors, so that they should give credit to their customers for several days.

The pleasure-mongers in the fairs had also received a subvention, and every open place in Paris had become a fair. It was necessary that the people should amuse themselves, for when there is amusement there is no danger. The Kermesse grew and throve in an extraordinary way.

As they had no bread at home, the women came out to the fair with their husbands, dragging their children with them. And the people of Paris rejoiced in all respectability, men, women, and children together, although the free distribution of drink began to act upon the weaker minds.

But alcohol is always dangerous.

On the 17th, just after dinner-time, when more drink than food had been consumed, the excitement became general. As minutes followed on the heels

of minutes, and drink upon the heel of drink, the effervescence grew. Men and women reeled in their walk and staggered, began dancing and stopped halfway in their dance, shouted ribald songs and mingled them with hymns and psalms. Here and there a quarrel occurred. Every young man paid too much attention to the wives and sisters of the married men. And in this sea of wild excitement the children ran here and there, pushed about and hustled, frightened, sobbing, looking for their mothers, knocked down at times and trampled underfoot, crying with fatigue and hunger. Suddenly a cry arose:

"To bed with the women and children!"

Everybody agreed at once, and reechoed the shout. The women themselves, in whom the feeling of motherhood awoke again, approved of the idea, and gathering the children up, without saying goodbye to the men, went off, sup-

ported by their little ones as much as leading them; went off to their cold beds and empty bread-baskets at home.

When they had gone, quarrels were being settled over a few last drinks, when the voice, the same voice, perhaps, which had given such good advice before, shrieked aloud a call to sudden madness. A wild, inarticulate frenzied clamour echoed the shout, and then, in gangs, this drunken crowd rolled off in sullen silence towards the lowest haunts of pleasure in the city, towards the red lanterns which glimmered in sinister vulgarity in the dark side streets.

And the impossible occurred.

At the very moment when each one of the groups paused in front of the door of disgrace, at the very moment when this door opened to them, there passed between the crowd of waiting men and the half-opened door, slowly, smilingly radiant, a pair of true lovers with their arms around one another. Perhaps they

were those who had been married that same day, those who would have said "No" to the mayor if they had not known themselves to be united by true love, even before they had made declaration to the world of their wish to live and die together. And, as they saw them, the men stepped back, dazzled, sobered, and touched. They fell back. Their memories fell back as well as their bodies, and with a frightened gesture of disgust they wiped from their minds the idea of the vulgar pleasure which awaited them beyond those open doors, remembering, each one of them, the day when he was like the young man who had passed, happy as he was, half-way like him to Heaven on the wings of delicious dreams, trembling with joy at the weight on his shoulder of the woman who was to be the mother of his children. They fell back and they fled, listening to no appeal from those shameful thresholds, fled to their memories and to new hopes, fled to the

little home which was quite large enough to hold much happiness.

Next morning, from each of the houses, which are tolerated by the Government, charges against "a person or persons unknown" were sent to the Home Office. No notice was taken of them officially, but at the Cabinet Council, which was held that day, there was some talk of these complaints, and the members of the Cabinet exchanged views as to the measures which sooner or later they might be compelled to take against X—the Person unknown.

These things and others, for it is impossible to chronicle all that happened, were told in the newspapers at length, but without comment. The managers of the Paris papers had agreed to adopt this tone in speaking of Jesus. They were beginning to share the general uneasiness, which had some foundation, and was really serious. They were beginning to

ask one another how long this state of things would last. They refused to believe that it could be permanent and definite, for that would have been the end of everything, and things were going very badly as it was.

As to the explanation of the "No" itself, that might be explained later when it could be treated as past history. To inquisitive women and children who asked for an explanation of the wonder, people replied with a sceptical smile which showed that they did not believe their own words:

"It is a whim of God."

However, the whim was not a passing one, and the serious minded whispered to themselves, as Tribulat Bonhomet did when he looked at the stars:

"Will all this never come to an end?"

In Paris, days count as hours, or (when public curiosity is over-excited by phenomena of which the cleverest under-

stand nothing), as centuries, and that was the case now.

The "White Leprosy," as the journalists had called the constantly growing blank spaces in the daily papers, had become a sort of disease which was undermining the habits and customs of the capital. Paris was becoming astoundingly honest and excruciatingly honourable.

Contrary to all logic, contrary to all likelihood, contrary to all possibility, public virtue and public poverty grew simultaneously. It was less like a miracle than like madness. The psychologists declared it to be a new form of moral epidemic, and a terribly contagious one, too, against which there was no known remedy.

On the 18th December it was noticed that five days had passed without the declaration of a single real crime at the Police Prefecture or at the police stations. The Law Courts had nothing to

do. There were a few small cases of quarrels in the street, cases of vagabondage, and the like, but the judges always acquitted the prisoners.

In the street people went about calmly and smiling affably, and even cordially to one another, struggling with one another for the right to step down into the roadway to let one another pass.

The shopkeepers were scrupulously honest, superstitiously honest. They would have preferred a heavy loss to the slightest gain to which they had no real right, but they found little use for this new virtue. For there were no more customers, or hardly any now, and their establishments were empty. This, in spite of their newly-attained purity of spirit, annoyed the shopkeepers considerably.

It was a period of apotheosis in the history of women. Politeness, which had been somewhat neglected in Paris for some time past, grew up again both in the

streets and in the drawing-rooms. The exquisite gallantry, the respectful, almost religious, politeness which had been the loveliest flower of France's garden in old times, blossomed into being once again under the sunshine of French women's smiles, and men delighted in it, finding there another charm in life.

This revival of politeness was perhaps the only wholly pleasant thing which characterised these extraordinary days, significant, as it was, of truth and nature in its fulness and its grace. In all other shapes which honour and honesty put on or pretended to put on, there was a more or less marked touch, a more or less decipherably false note of artificial heroism which could not possibly last.

But with all the poetry of logic, this adoration of womanhood was a direct result of the curious elevation of the feelings of everybody, an elevation caused, whether people believed in it or not, by the mysterious presence of Incarnate God

in the bosom of a woman. Although His mother was not known this time, the touching legend grew up again around Him, and glorified every mother, for it recalled to every man the holy dignity of motherhood, the source of all life. And this purified gallantry acquired a touch of mysticism, and found once again the delicate tinge of Gothic tenderness which worshipped the human image of divine grace in the grace of woman, and which dedicated the finest cathedrals in France to the Virgin.

Who knows what masterpieces of art, what works of modern genius this state of mind might have brought into being if it had only lasted? But almost from the beginning it was constrained and paralysed by a dull exasperation, which every mind capable of reflection felt to be growing. For every thinking man knew that the reforms which were being accomplished in violence and in silence before their eyes were, and would always

be, quite incompatible with the essential and constituted elements of humanity as the centuries have formed it. They were quite incompatible with man's strength and weakness, with his virtues, and with his vices. Nothing could harm humanity now more than absolute honour and absolute honesty. Man's whole life dwelt on compromise, on interests which counterbalanced. The uncompromising conception of Jesus was naïvely homicidal. Society could not resist one single year of such a state of things. It must bring about the total downfall of society.

These thoughts and ideas which were formulated in the minds of a few thinking men with clearness, haunted the minds of everybody, more or less. And in most minds they smothered all desire for holiness.

And it must not be forgotten, too, that there was poverty, and that the poverty was growing every moment. The mystic and joyous heroism which was sustaining

the people of Paris, must break down sooner or later under the pressure of necessity. And then what would happen?

Face to face with this danger the Government did its best. Every member agreed spontaneously to make personal sacrifice for the general interest. There were acts of devotion on all sides. Many of those who yielded to a generous impulse and came to the help of the State were, in their hearts, astonished at their own initiative. Without knowing it they, too, were infected. They, like everybody else, were ill with the disease of honesty.

There is no need to say that the newspapers did not escape the disease. They remained prudently reserved, on the defensive, one might almost say, waiting, not without impatience, for "this state of things" to finish, and with no illusions on the chances of success of Jesus and His effort.

And the journalists, after having been flattered because Jesus had made Him-

self known through them in the first place, had begun to suffer from the crushing competition with Him.

He was the only topic people cared to read about. Politics, aviation, science, letters, art, none of these things mattered to the readers of the papers since His coming. They only glanced at the papers to learn what He had said or done the day before, or what He was going to say or do on the next day. There was no interest in anything but Him. The ordinary events of real life, all fiction, too, had lost their interest, and people were bored to death now in all the theatres, which had become uncompromisingly modest. Life, in fact, was becoming dull, in spite of the fair which the Government maintained at great expense on the outside boulevards, in spite of the triumph of virtue, in spite of the reign of womanhood, even in spite of the heavy clouds on the horizon.

"He has deceived us," declared Crucol

to his comrades one day at *La Poule D'Or*.

"'Tis true," said Frène. "I expected something better. He has sent us stumbling into morality as old women in the country stumble into piety."

"We may be mistaken," said Narda. "We may be understanding Him quite wrongly."

"Then why doesn't He speak more clearly?"

"No," said somebody else. "There is no need for Him to speak at all. Let Him do something."

"You don't mean to suggest that He's done nothing," exclaimed Narda. "He's changed every condition in our existence, without even the help of the Disciples and The Seventy. It's come to a point where . . ."

"Where life has become impossible," Larrivé interrupted. "He's doing too much and He's not doing enough. He's doing too much to allow us to doubt, and

not enough to make things clear to us. And He's double-sided. His virtue engenders wickedness; His honour and honesty produce poverty and pain for us."

"Yes," said Narda. "It's quite logical that order should exasperate disorder. They enter into conflict, and one of the two must yield."

"And which will yield in your opinion?"

"Why, order, of course," said Narda.

IV

A PARISIAN NICODEMUS

NARDA lived in the shadow of Jesus.

Sometimes he felt his mind clear and saw distinctly. Sometimes he was dazzled to the point of blindness, and his days and nights were consumed in cruel alternatives of happy certainty and of despair. The troubles of his spirit wearied his body. During these days of fever he grew thin and strangely pale. His friends became anxious about him.

And yet he had rare and intermittent moments of extreme lucidity, during which he took counsel with his conscience, and realised that he was himself the reason of his mental trouble because he was divided against himself. But he understood that his mental trouble was the condition of his salvation, and he be-

gan to see the meaning of the words, *"Sickness is the natural state of the Christian."*

"At all events," he told himself, "it is the natural state of the Christian who is not certain of his heart and of his understanding. Am I of good will? Am I ready to do and to suffer, and do I really know what He requires of me?"

He answered himself at once, and despair cast down his spirit.

"I know what He wants, but I don't know what I want myself. The best thing about me is that I suffer from both my knowledge and my ignorance. The saddest thing about me is that I have no esteem either for myself or for the men who breathe the breath of life with me, for all of us are making death of life."

One evening when he was sorrowfully thinking over these things alone in his room, a trembling came upon him, and in a voice which he himself did not recognise he cried aloud:

"That is what He has come to tell us! That's it. It is that we must return to life! It is that we must be born again! We have known it for a long time, and if we have not yet made the effort which He has asked us to make, it is because we are incapable of ever making it."

He pondered and then shook his head.

"No, we are not sure of it any longer. We are no longer sure of anything. We have forgotten. We are shrouded in darkness. The immense multitude of mankind has ceased even to suffer from its lack of faith, from its lack of God, from its soullessness. False Messiahs in their wisdom have taught us that this is the best thing for us, that there is no belief and no hope. Life is directionless, it has no enthusiasms. All is certain misfortune and dangerous pleasure. And yet we are not asked to humble ourselves in the least before this miserable perspective. Nothing has been done for us. Man is a mere consequence of the workings of

nature, not their goal. And yet man must consider himself capable of indefinite perfection. He must pass the wonders of the world through the sieve of his reason. He must observe, must make experiments, must deduce, must feel certain that each day he will find the solution of at least one of life's innumerable mysteries. Has he not declared already, 'Henceforth the world is devoid of mystery'?

"How contradictory it all is. The same wise men who ask us to work without ceasing 'until the end,' Taine for example, warn us, too, that this 'end' (not the end of each of us but that of our terrestrial universe) is very near—that the days of the earth-machine are numbered. Then, why all this labour? We know that the series of mysteries is infinite, and that our undefined perfection will be roughly interrupted. The uselessness of all effort is evident. The only wise thing to do would be to play dom-

inoes. But Jesus has also told us that 'Heaven and earth will pass away, but My Words will never pass away.' He has told us, too, that nothing shall remain hidden, that everything shall be known, shall be revealed, and He has told us that we are capable of perfection, not to-morrow, but immediately. 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect.' Even as God is perfect! Have we then the divine capacity? What a temptation! It is as though He said, 'Ye shall be gods!' He is God and Beelzebub!"

Narda trembled, then smiled at himself for having dared to think these things and to use such an expression.

"What does it matter since we are lost? For we are lost beyond redemption, and not even He Himself can save us. The conditions of our thought forbid Him the violent intervention which would dishonour and destroy our humanity. Perhaps he performed miracles in the old

days. I hardly know. But I know that to-day we should not believe in them. We should say to the miracle-monger who raised the dead, 'It is true that in our present state of knowledge we cannot explain this phenomenon, but there are many other phenomena which could not be explained ten centuries ago, or even a hundred years ago, of which we now know the causes and effects perfectly well. Return again a little later, Lord, and we will answer You.' Between the Creator and His creatures all communication has really been interrupted. We refuse to believe. The romance of divinity is ended. We have read the last page of it; it has not interested us. God, the Devil! How old these words are now. How superannuated, how faded!"

Narda clenched his hands.

"And yet," he said, "I know quite well what He demands of us, and I know quite well that there is nothing to be done but just exactly that which He commands us

to do. He asks us to cease from being dead men, and to live. That is to say, he bids us suffer. For perpetual suffering is the only life. He asks us to be heroes, saints, gods. To be perfect every day and all day unceasingly. It is not reasonable, and yet—and yet He helps us. He prays for us. He holds out His hand and we see the best among us rise to answer Him. That ought to impress every man who is capable of reflection. He told me so the night I met Him, and I had already thought about it. Those who have eyes to see, see Him; those who have ears to hear, hear Him. He comes back to us constantly, He never leaves us. What is happening now is not exceptional in any way. All that He wants is to force all of us, the least thoughtful of us, to perceive the perpetual miracle which is at the root of ordinary life, which gives it a meaning. Why should we not all admit the truth of what we all can see? Why should we obstinately

refuse to be happy? Why am I so unconquerably certain that He has come in vain? Why should we all reply to Him, 'We cannot'?"

He shook his head gently. A broken-hearted smile twisted up his mouth.

"It is absolutely true. We cannot. We never shall be able. He may say what He likes, His law is too hard. Besides, He thinks too highly of us. Is it our pride which protests against the all too glorious image of ourselves which He presents to us? Then our pride would really be modesty, and man would be recalling God to moderation, to the true sense of proportion. We cannot accept the idea of perfection. We cannot consent to the sacrifice. The life of individuals and social life are both of them founded upon interest and pleasure alone. And if all is to disappear, let us hasten, let us enjoy our lives and the world."

Narda's eyes were filled with tears.

"How can we refrain from adoring the world? I hate the men of science for a thousand terrible reasons, among others because they declare coldly that the world must perish, and all religions are in agreement with the men of science on that point. That is why I am afraid of the gods and of God. Are not living forms the signs of living truth? Will this handwriting disappear as our eyes close? Is there only one immortal word, Death? There is no logical solution to the conflict of those who love life and those who love death. It is quite natural that the heirs of the magnificent plastic idea of antiquity should have persecuted, tortured, and killed Nature's enemies. They poisoned humanity. Nietzsche has reason on his side. It is impossible that beauty should be evil, that beauty should have been created only to test our virtue. The admiration which we cannot help but feel for it, makes us greater, strengthens us, makes us purer. Our gift of admira-

tion, of understanding, of enjoyment, puts us in possession of everything, multiplies our soul. The landscapes with their rich line and the harmony of their shades live within us, think and love within us, add their own lives to ours. The form of eternity is written in a woman's breast. And how great is the virtue of admiration! The joy of being admired makes beautiful creatures more beautiful still, just as the joy of being understood makes genius greater yet, as the joy of being loved multiplies the power of loving a hundredfold in every lover. Oh, the miracle of eyes which reflect one another, mirrors which mingle their reflections and their brightness, and in mingling, exalt them! Oh, this exchange of two great soaring bursts of tenderness which, enriched one by the other, raise the heart above all human barriers! 'I love you because you are beautiful.' 'I love you because your love exalts my beauty.' This dialogue is the true reality of our

life. It is the true divinity. It is Nature, and there is no other."

Of a sudden, Narda remembered that some theologians proved the existence of God by the splendours of Nature, and he said to himself that this proof might before long become an immediate fact. For it satisfies and reconciles the pagan and the Christian instinct, which have no doubt always worked together in the soul of man, but which in our time have attained an intensity and a sharpness unknown till now, although neither of the two has allowed itself to be wiped out by the other or has consented to yield to it. Nobody can deny that the mysticism of the priests has always borrowed its most precious resources from eternal beauty, and with it has composed the masterpieces of religious art of the Middle Ages, which are the most glorious marvels of our history. And will the doctors, while they baptise all Nature and exploit it for the benefit of dogma, continue telling us

that Nature is the domain of the Evil One, and that all its beauties are pitfalls for the unwary? There is a complete contradiction between the law of Nature and the law of revelation, but what is revelation when compared with Nature? How constant Nature is, and how reassuring because of this same constancy! Nature never contradicts herself. The clouds are in harmony with the trees. Fauna and flora are logically and reciprocally dependent upon one another. The sea and the wind, the shadow and the light obey the same invariable laws, and count the throbs of the earth's great heart. Revelation is capricious. It hesitates and is full of dark places.

And Narda, whose steps precocious curiosity had led into the libraries, remembered certain startling contradictions between the inspired texts of the Bible and the arguments brought up against it by exponents during centuries of sincere and laborious research. There

is no need any longer to prove the historic fragility, the philosophical and moral fragility of the texts. It has caused, and will always cause, a number of defections in the Church of which many have been famous. But one phenomenon is at least as startling as that of these defections. It is the phenomenon of the conversions which are as countless as the defections have been. Priests desert the Christian flag, and poets, artists, and even scientists, enrol themselves beneath it. Faith seems to change its whereabouts without suffering any decided loss, either in the number or in the quality of the faithful, for the value of the new volunteers under the banner is as great as that of those who leave it. These individual storms of conscience, therefore, provide no argument either for or against.

His mind dwelt on dangerous suppositions, which seemed to him of great importance at the moment. He wondered whether this hesitancy of text, this vague-

ness of outline, were not intentional and necessary. Why could not God have enfranchised or disinherited human conditions by means of what was written? Supposing we admit the pretensions of the evangelists to inspiration? Where does inspiration begin, and where does it end? To what extent does the participation of the writers in divine knowledge raise them above the purely human sphere? May we not accept the supposition that their infallibility remains stationary on the frontier lines of dogma? For the recital of facts has only the authority of the memory, not even of Mark or of Matthew, but just of the so-called first witnesses who, after all, are capable of every error of exaggeration and forgetfulness. As in the case of everything that Jesus did, or that His historians say that He did, they leave our wills free to believe or to deny, so that our faith may have some merit. This explains the discrepancies of the stories. Logic-

ally, even if we admit that none of them be marked with the divine approval, does it not appear that the Church would have kept to one single story, if only to prevent countless discussions which must undermine its authority? In not denying them, did it act aimlessly? We are assured that the apocryphal writings are of the same value as the authentic gospels, which same were chosen at haphazard. We are assured that not one of their supposed authors is really he who has been named to us. What difference does that make? Four texts which agreed absolutely would be as absurd as a material and brutal miracle. The broad differences of the gospels trace for us, and measure out a margin on which we may, if we so wish, refuse to write the word "Credo."

At this point in his meditations, which were intense and almost painful, Narda felt that he was fainting, that he was losing consciousness, that he was falling

asleep with eyes wide open. And in this morbid state he had a dream that was as strange as it was beautiful.

In the twilight of the day, in the garden of the Bible, in the midst of the glorious luxuriance of Eden, amid lawns of beautifully clear, deep colours, of foliage tinted like the flowers, of flowers which were the smiles of the earth, three old men stood, quite motionless, upon a little hill. Although the dreamer could not see the limits of this garden of Paradise, he imagined them to be in the misty distance, knowing that this place of enchantment was the centre and the summit of all things. In the distance, in the shadow, lay the world. In the distance and the shadow the nations struggled. One of the three Magi raised his right hand, and it was luminous in the twilight. Rays of light streamed from each one of the five fingers, throwing out luminous pyramids, of which each one of the five fingers was the apex, and each pyramid

of light lit up one of the five parts of the world. Continents and islands, with their towns, fields, forests, mountains, and seas, were lit up clearly now. Narda could see them move and roll, and almost thought he heard the noise of them. The Wise Man of the East pronounced a few words in a language of metallic resonance, then dropped his hand into the shadow. The garden disappeared, with the world, with the continents, and with the seas.

Slowly out of the mist in which all things and living beings vanished, there sprang a town. It was a town of gold, a happy town, the brilliant stones of which were baking in the sunshine. A town of open spaces limited to the reach of the human voice in its normal measure in hours of serenity. A town of little narrow streets which climbed winding up the hillside. The little hill which hung over the city was dotted with buildings of exquisite grandeur. Their grandeur lay in the measured moderation of their

proportions, for they were little temples each one of which contained a goddess or a god. But it was man who filled the town. All round him the divinities from the temples peopled the atmosphere with brilliant images. Man came and went among them, surrounded by them, but in no way constrained. Sometimes he spoke to them, sometimes he listened as they told him of what he had been thinking. His thought was not his own. It was that of his ancestors from time immemorial, that of the heroes of his race. He only asked for its oracular expression at those moments when some enchanting novelty threatened antique tradition. This constant presence of the past made the future more certain. Man knew that he had sprung from the divinity, but he was mad enough to think that he could become greater by moving away from it, by trying to surpass it. He started with an absolute denial of all possibility of progress. He made up his own mind

to his own dignity, and conceived it in the invariable shape of divine dignity. The Greek heard without ceasing advice for his return to the perfection of the Greek gods, and the priests, the poets, and the artists maintained their secret mission of preaching its maintenance so that the town, built on this model, should also remain faithful to itself.

So man lived on among the innumerable gods, innumerably and infinitely different. Their brilliant images surrounded him like constellations outside his life, but of which his life was the centre. He opened his arms and touched them to prove to himself his peaceful mastery of Nature, a Nature of which the gods were the multiple and harmonious souls, and the gods and man made a free and flexible alliance in the interests of human happiness.

Little by little the dusk of evening fell upon this enchanted town. There was still a touch of light upon the height of

the acropolis. But the streets and squares were filled with shadow and with melancholy. Then night gathered upon the hill, and a great sea of darkness rolled over the entire town.

The garden appeared a second time. There was no change there, and the three Kings were standing motionless as ever on the little hill. The second of them raised his hand. The five portions of the world were flooded with pyramids of light, and the tumult of life was visible again. And as before some words were spoken, the night dropped, and the garden disappeared into the darkness, with the world, the continents, and the seas. Out of this darkness rose a new town. It was not as the first one had been, a happy town in the glory of the rich rays of an eastern sun. It was a hard, forbidding, and imperious town. The gazer saw violent contrasts with the first, among its monuments, and among its people. It seemed as though one period of salvation had

just finished and as though another were beginning. Some of the people remained faithful to the past. The two parties were hostile one to the other, and faced one another, threatening. There were ruins which showed that it was the morrow of a great disaster. And yet this young world, which had been born in mourning, was powerful already and had full consciousness of its strength. But it did not look either to Nature or to itself for joy and glory. It looked beyond, perpetually beyond, and in the distance every man gazed at one immutable Being, who was his God. With this God, who had become a foreigner to the elements which He Himself had created, men lived face to face in tragic meditation, disturbed in turn by spasms of love and cries of terror. God remained outside man, but did not manifest Himself to his senses or come into his life by means of oracles and prodigies. He summoned His faithful to the life that was to come, and they saw

nothing in their destiny but the returning path to this God who was quite inaccessible as yet, the road to Whom was dangerous, rising steeply and precipitously, to an invisible end. Many went along it backwards, carrying flowers in their hand and singing songs; but mingled with their cries of joy one could hear the vibration of despair, and in their laughter there was gnashing of teeth.

And for the second time night drank up the scene.

And for the third time the three Wise Men appeared, standing upon the little hill in the garden. But the sleeper waited and looked in vain for the third Wise Man to raise his hand. It seemed to him, however, that his greedy gaze met the gaze of the old man, and that he read in his eyes what might have happened, what, no doubt, would have happened if this third King, as the other two had done, had made the sign which draws the world out of the darkness into day.

Narda awoke.

His dream was present in his thoughts, and he lived it again and penetrated its true meaning. He murmured to himself, "This is the third, the last phase of the history of God. He began by surrounding and protecting us with His plastic ubiquity. Then He drew nearer, becoming One, and offered to live with each one of us in terrible and entrancing solitude. Now He comes nearer still. He wants to live in us, but wants to disappear, to mingle His own life with ours so that there shall no longer be man and his God, but man who is God. Is this what we mean when we stammer the word 'progress'? Is this the deep hidden meaning of the Eucharist? Are we on the brink of a new period of Christian salvation? But when will the third Wise Man make the necessary gesture with his hand? What is he waiting for? Does he not know that we can do no more? The Pharisees said so to Jesus a few days

ago. Evil is eating us up and we have no strength for righteousness. Oh, my God! will good triumph over evil? Alas! we do not even know what is good and what is evil. We do not even know if there be good and evil. Yet He knows. Perhaps the Wise Man has made the motion with his hand which brings good with it, and Jesus brings us the new revelation. He comes from the Garden. He is the light thrown on to the world by the third of the Wise Men."

A smile suddenly lit up Narda's tortured face.

"I must say I am not at all modern," he said to himself. "Revelation, the first fall, perpetual redemption! There is nothing in me at all antagonistic to these three ideas which science has repudiated. The instinct of my mind dwells on them. It is absolutely scandalous, and if the men of science were to hear me they would die of shame. Unfortunately, while I have the deepest respect for science, I have no

respect whatever for scientists. Modern scientists who believe in the objective reality of the universe and all their formulæ, would govern the city by means of these formulæ, which cannot last. It is not for us to discover truth, and Jesus told us the other day that truth could not be taught. How can we obtain by successive and multiplied effort what is eternal and one? All human accomplishment is marked with this sign of unity and eternity. Herodotus has said, 'Man has found out what was beautiful long since, and it is there that we should look for instruction.' Poetry and art bring us back imperiously to the revelation of a law of universal harmony, and it is their function to create humanity again, and to create it ceaselessly according to this law. The sculptor models the statue to which the poet gives speech. The men of science should do nothing more than defend the marble of the statue against the action of air and time. True science and true

art are not distinct. Art and science have one common object in this harmony which is in man, and which it is their duty to discover in Nature. The poet and the man of science live in an abstract world, which is the foundation and the depth, the justification and the explanation, the material and the plan of the world of plastic reality. Both poet and man live, really speaking, in the supernatural. The man of science is always ready to proclaim the excellence of a law unknown till now or which has been forgotten, and the poet lends his ear unceasingly to the dictation of ineffable analogy. The four angles of the square in which I see the truth shining are:—Revelation, the Fall, Redemption, the Supernatural. I am an abominable reactionary."

He shook his head.

"Theoretically I am a reactionary; but what am I in practice? Could I ever make my life and my thoughts one and the same? It is quite clear that if I go

on living as I have lived until now, I forbid myself all real joy and all real self-respect. I have no difficulty in reconciling my loyalty with faith. My loyalty is not the difficulty. The difficulty is——"

Narda hesitated. His lips trembled for a moment. Then he said aloud:

"The difficulty is my cowardice. It is impossible for us to accept loyally the life we have made for ourselves, to go on living as nearly all of us live, . . . and yet we shall all go on living as we have lived.

"'We are the dupes of our own egoism and our vanity.' We have dishonoured Nature, poisoned the fountains of our joys. We refuse to recognise the real man in us and in our kind. We live without any motive for life. We neither love nor live. We are violent and we are flabby. We are nervous, we are empty, we are sad. Gold is the universal goal, and

it divides men into two flocks, that of the poor, who are bitter and inquisitive, and that of the rich, who have been deceived and are distrustful. We are dupes and liars, victims and torturers, cowards and boasters. We are no better than the brutes. We look at woman as a horse-dealer looks at horses which he means to buy, and woman takes this insult as a homage! And yet, does woman deserve any better? Woman as we have made her, as she has consented to become, is necessary, and our horsedealer's look tells us what we think of her. What hope is there for the generations who will be born from this ignominious outrage? The simple answer to this question is in the immense number of young criminals. They have begun to make Society uneasy, and Society is trying to restrain precocious criminality. But there is only one real way. Love must be born again, and must be rehabilitated. As long as the

masters of the moment centre their activity on the acquisition of money and the power of enjoyment, they have no right to prevent others from having the same ideals, and these others are poor and are young. We have no right to punish them for living as we live. It is true that during the last few days, since He has been here, everything has changed. Men show women a respect which astonishes them, and which astonishes the men who show it. It will not last. There can be no mistake about that. It is a surprise, a misunderstanding, and even now we cannot fail to see signs of fatigue. Jesus has awakened in us the tenderness which is always in the depths of our hearts. But He has had no influence upon our minds. The poets and artists who have been the first to hear His call to heroism have become lazy. It is true that they have given up the lower forms of sensuality, but what does that matter if they put nothing in its place. They have obeyed negatively,

their obedience has left them disconcerted and sterile, and the public is bored.

"Boredom! That is what Jesus has brought to us! The newspapers, books, theatres and exhibitions, the streets—everything has become a bore since He came. Why?"

Narda walked with bent head up and down his room. He stopped in front of a large looking-glass, into the frame of which were tucked pictures of naked women. He looked at them, then looked at his own face in the glass. He examined it closely, analysing his features, which years of wakeful nights, of pleasures, and of suffering had already marked deeply. He studied the wrinkles in which were written the history of his miserable life, the complicated latticework of lines which crossed and recrossed one another, breaking off here and there and contradicting one another, clear signs of the contradictions of a mind which did not follow the same line always. Proofs of

weakness, proofs of a will which his own face made clear. "Why?" he asked again.

"Why, because we cannot obey Him. He has come in vain. We cannot bear His coming; perhaps we cannot understand it. We have not the strength to wish. And we have not the wish to have strength to obey Him."

V.

THE SCIENTISTS' QUESTION

FUTURE historians, if they wish to arrive at the inner meaning of the events which I have related here so hastily, will not fail to study the attitude of the Church towards Jesus. The whole Church, collectively and individually, ignored Him who called Himself the Son of God.

Neither the Pope (who was the Pope nicknamed, in the prophecy attributed to Malachi, *Religio Depopulata*) nor the least or greatest among the princes of his priesthood, not even one of those priests who have been unfrocked or threatened, and who are to be found all over Paris, no priest, no ecclesiastic of any kind seemed to have taken the least notice of His coming. Nothing was said either in the Confessional or in the pulpits by men

of the Church about His person, His doctrine, or His acts. The priests even refused to reply to certain questions which were put to them directly, giving it to be understood that they were not allowed to answer. Was this silence a sign of disapproval? Did it mean that they considered the Visit an imposture? Or did it mean a deep respect for the Divine will and a firm resolve not to trouble the designs of that will? One might, greatly daring, deduce from the discretion of Jesus Himself that a tacit compact of mutual neutrality had been concluded between Him and His Church. He did not wish to compromise it. It was not to restrain Him. During the whole time of His new life on earth He was not once seen inside a temple. It was even noticed that on the day on which He led the crowd from *La Place de l'Etoile* to Montmartre, as I shall narrate presently, He went by a roundabout way across Paris so as to avoid passing a church.

Another observation, the importance of which will escape nobody, is that in no single one of His conversations or in His great sermon on the hilltop, did He risk the least allusion, distant or otherwise, to the sacrament or to church ceremonies. The only thing He recommended was prayer. But led me add that the silence of Jesus on this point has not necessarily the meaning that one might be tempted to give it. It is not necessarily a condemnation of liturgic prescriptions. It must not be forgotten that in these things His name alone is the whole programme, and that if He did not repeat His former sayings and His former acts neither did He retract them. Let us avoid all arbitrary interpretation. Prayer, which He ordered, is the principal and to some extent the common element of every sacrament.

Besides, and I must insist upon this, for it is an essential consideration, the inexplicable circumstances which, as I have said before, I can only chronicle in sum-

mary fashion here, have occurred too recently for a definite appreciation of their significance, and their consequences, to be wise. Writers with more authority than I, will, I hope and trust, make a point of bringing their light to bear upon what has happened. This is all the more necessary because some writers have already dared to contest the objective reality of these historic happenings. That was to be expected, but however clever and however wise some of these gentlemen may be, their criticism must yield under the weight of the evidence. For the occurrences of the Divine Adventure have left traces in the Press and their authenticity is clear. It is perfectly patent that, in December, a Stranger calling Himself the Son of God appeared among us, and that His presence did not only excite universal curiosity, but created a wide-spread movement of thought. The influence He had upon our customs is undeniable, for as we know too well, we still suffer from

it. There is no question that we are facing a difficult problem, a problem which is singular, which is disquieting, and which is of a very special nature. But the interest that lies in its study is incontestable, and it would be spiritual cowardice to attempt to avoid it. Whatever be the nature and the principle of the unknown quantities in the equation, we should do our utmost to discover them by a series of operations of a more conclusive and less brutal nature than those employed by the French Government, as I shall relate, to set the question at rest. I wish to lay down no law to the thinkers who will attempt to elucidate these mysteries. My object is merely to recount what Jesus did and said, to tell what people heard Him say and saw Him do. The only commentary I shall add is in the expression of the feelings which His acts and sayings aroused among those who were the witnesses of His coming.

With regard to the relationship of

Jesus and the Church during this visit, let me point out this, in addition to what I have said already. Jesus came to Paris, not to Rome. He brought His second message to the world to the *centre of modern civilisation,* which centre is democratic and officially atheistic. *He did not bring it to the centre of Christianity.* Is it too much to deduce from this choice that He wished—without interrupting the action of His Church, but without showing His alliance with her—to make men open their eyes to His light, to the only simple and pure logic? We must leave this question open. The reader must decide it for himself. We can insist on it no more.

In opposition to the clergy, who remained sternly on one side, the lay public, especially the intellectual aristocracy of the universities, had responded in great numbers to the call of Jesus. *L'Hôtel des Trois Rois* was besieged from morning till night by compact groups of serious

men in black, whose severe elegance was the outward sign of their learned profession. The crowd was no longer the picturesquely mixed crowd of the first few days. All these gentlemen, from the eldest to the youngest of them, carried on their persons the perfume of the dust of the libraries. They came prepared with difficult questions, which they had discussed at the Sorbonne before they came. And it was easy to see, at first glance at these clever faces, that with these redoubtable adversaries the Saviour would have to find some better answer than a parable. The memories of these men were stocked with facts. Their minds had been nourished on German literature. They would not be content with poetic symbols. They knew biology, geology, and history. They established themselves upon firm ground, from which evangelic paradox would have no power to drive them.

I will not weary the reader with a full

analysis of the speeches which they made to Jesus. To do so I should have to fill a library, for they spoke of everything and of nothing. The journalists, who were ill-prepared to follow these abstruse discussions in detail, reported them in the newspapers with considerable negligence. Even Larrivé, although he called himself a man of science, wrote long and confused articles about them, which the public found some difficulty in understanding. These articles, written in a mixture of scientific jargon and of boulevard slang, were thought very highly of, although they were not read at all, which fact proves the secret alliance of the two contradictory apophthegms, "Omne ignotum pro magnifico," and "Ignoti nulla cupido." In these articles Larrivé talked of Lucretius, of Newton, of Lavoisier, and of Laplace, of Goethe, of Spencer, of Rau, of Claude Bernard, of Bérigard, of Ostwald, of Lamarck, of Darwin, of Carnot, of Naegelli, of Democritus,

of Kant, of Empedocles, of Liebnitz, of Descartes, of Heraclitus, Aristotle, Spinoza, James Sully, Von Hartmann, Shakespeare, Seneca, Haller, Tolstoy, Renan Bhudda, Solomon, Nietzsche, and Schopenhauer, of Galileo, Taine, Copernic, and many others without much more method than I have put into the list of names.

Messieurs Poincaré, Le Dantec, Painlevé, Metchnikoff, and all their eminent colleagues made surprising speeches in Larrivé's article on the conflict of reason and dogma, on the law of substance, on the law of evolution, on feeling and conscience, on the end of matter, on the origin of man, on the origin of language, on the freedom of thought, and so forth.

From the replies of Jesus, which were summary and not too clear—perhaps they were not too clearly reported—it resulted that the Son of Man seemed to know little of the astonishing progress of the human race in the course of the last century, that

He was not at all up-to-date in theoretical science, in the true knowledge of Nature, and in the marvels and countless practical and technical applications of scientific principles, to industry, commerce, hygiene, therapeutics, and surgery. In a word, that He seemed to know little of the least and of the most important necessities of modern daily life. It appeared that Jesus had made little progress since the days of Judea. His ideas on hygiene were scandalously and dangerously primitive. "Not that which goeth in at the mouth defileth a man: but what cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man." Or again, "Therefore, I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink, nor for your body what ye shall put on. Is not your life more than meat and your body more than raiment?" On hearing these words Monsieur Metchnikoff felt positively ill. He undertook to instruct Jesus, but Jesus interrupted him and said,

"Ye are blind leaders of the blind, and if the blind lead the blind, shall not both fall into the ditch?" "The ditch shall be disinfected, dear Lord," was the witty retort of the director of the Pasteur Institute. And without being discouraged in the least, he made a long and complete speech on scientific history to Jesus, telling him of all the progress and of the benefits of science. He wound up in these words. "Science has already justified the hopes which man put in it. It has permitted us to combat the most terrible diseases, and has rendered existence possible. Religion, on the contrary, which called for faith without criticism as a means of curing the ills which afflict humanity, has proved incapable of keeping its promise."

Jesus replied:

"My Kingdom is not of this world. I did not promise, of old time, to cure humanity of its disease. My object is not to make life easier, but to make it holier. I have said 'Blessed are they that mourn.'

The important thing is not to escape pain but to escape evil. The struggle against pain is the outcome of egoism, and I have said, 'He that taketh not up his cross, and followeth Me, is not worthy of Me.' The all-important thing is to love God more than one's self and to honour one's father and mother, but there is no room in your thoughts for things of the spirit, for you are preoccupied with things of the flesh. That is why there is nothing in common between you and My people."

It is probable that these discussions between the learned men and the Son of God were noted down word for word by the journalists, but the long reports of these discussions were a mass of contradictions. It must, of course, be admitted that the work of the reporters was made terribly difficult by the fact that the men of science disagreed among themselves. The discussions with Jesus degenerated, every day, into quarrels, in the course of which these men of science excommuni-

cated and anathematised one another, while Jesus listened with a sad smile.

But all these academicians, all these noble professors could not continue to lose their time which after all is the world's capital. Monsieur Poincaré had the idea, and everybody thought it a happy one, of inviting Jesus to a public meeting of the Academy of Science. There everything could be discussed once and for all.

Jesus declined the honour.

"I was twelve years old," He said, "when I consented to argue with the doctors in the temple. You can see for yourselves that I have passed that age now. But to-morrow I will go up on Montmartre and I will speak to the people. There I will say to all and everybody what it is necessary for one and all to know. Come with the people."

VI

THE SERMON ON MONTMART

ALL Paris was advised by the newspapers of what was to happen.

At twelve o'clock the whole of Paris marched up to *La Place de l'Etoile.*

The weather was fine in spite of the season. This Thursday, the 22nd of December, this day of a dark month, was made brilliant by an unexpected and impossible radiance of April sunshine.

Jesus started from the Arc de Triomphe. The children of the schools, who had a holiday that day, walked after him. The crowd followed, and behind the crowd followed the professors and the members of the Academy and of the Sorbonne, whose attitude gave to the ceremonial the solemn character of a funeral procession.

Jesus walked along the outside boulevards, where the workingmen were holiday-making in the booths of the great fair. He made a sign. The brass bands became silent, the merry-go-rounds stopped, and all the unhappy merrymakers, whom circumstances compelled to make holiday, joined in the procession. It passed on in miraculous silence, a silence in which the whole people felt their lives beating in their hearts. A silence of hope.

On the little square on the top of the hill, on which is placed the statue of Gérard de Nerval, Jesus paused. Then turning to those who followed Him, He brought them to a standstill at some distance from Him with a gesture of superhuman authority.

He was obeyed immediately and left alone for a short space. Leaning His elbow on the pedestal of the statue, He sank His head, and thought.

When He stood up again, the light in

His eyes was not the serene light which had shone there, but a flame, and the people saw that He was weeping. The water of His tears, added to the natural brilliance of His eyes, made a prismatic glitter which was more than human sight could bear.

Slowly the tears rolled down that splendid face of which no feature moved, and through His tears He looked out on the crowd.

A groan of love rose from the throng which clustered on the little square on the hill, spread down the streets to the bottom of the hillside, further and further yet. The whole town which had accompanied Jesus from *La Place de l'Etoile* lifted up their voices to Him, lifted up their million arms towards Him, towards His tears.

But the hands dropped again. The voices were silent. The whole town listened, for Jesus had opened His lips, and without knowing how or why, the whole

town which had seen His tears, now listened to and heard His words.

Jesus said:

"*Misereor super turbam.* Woe unto you, sheep without a shepherd, for you will cast off Him who has come to you, and His words shall be in vain to you. Woe unto this disillusioned century which has cast off joy and truth, a century of barbarity which persecutes in sheer hypocrisy the very prophets whose virtues it celebrates. Woe unto you, scattered flock, who come together for a moment in the desire for unity, for you will presently break off from all religion and will condemn yourselves."

Those who listened sprang back in revolt against this pitiless verdict, and the mouths of all present trembled in an outcry of powerless rage.

Jesus continued. His tears were dry. The flame in His eyes had dried them. His voice rang out harshly, and the sky, which had, all of a sudden, become a

winter sky again, seemed to be bending down to listen to Him.

"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. The truth shall be told again. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.

"Blessed are the so-called poor, for there is no other wealth than poverty. Blessed are ye who take nothing with your hands, who shut up nothing within the walls of your houses. Man withers what he touches, and possession deprives the possessor of the very blessing he desired. He folds it tight in his arms until he cannot see it, for satisfaction is the killing of desire. But you who have nothing, everything is yours. Your eyes and your spirit garner the flower of life. Take back to God the vivid and immortal love of life which makes you live. In God alone it shall receive full satisfaction. Whatever happens is but an allusion to God. Do not confound the symbol with reality.

"O ye poor, ye are blessed, for ye do not confound the shadow with the light, or the letter with the spirit. But the shadow calls you to the light, and you know that all things are the letters of the name of God."

Jesus was silent, watching on the faces round Him the effect of His words. The effect varied according to the soul of those who listened, for everyone understood the Word according to himself. To some of them it sounded like a blessing; to others like a curse. All the children and nearly all the women understood the words quite simply, just as Jesus spoke them, but the words underwent a change in the hearing of nearly all the men, and this is what they heard.

"Woe to ye seekers after gold, for the Kingdom of Heaven is not for you. Woe to ye who believe yourselves to be rich, for there is no other misery than your wealth. O ye who would take things with your hands, who would shut up the

treasures of the world within the walls of your houses, you perish without ceasing, for you kill desire within yourselves in shamelessness, and desire is the soul of the spirit. You feed upon vain images, and you are your own sepulchres." The bitterness of infinite deception marked the features of nearly all the men; nearly all the women and children smiled as though they were already in enjoyment of the promised happiness.

Jesus went on.

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Ye are blessed all of you who come to Me in meekness and humbleness of heart, who smile to Me as I smile to you, being as I am without bitterness and without violence. To you I give the earth that you may enjoy it meekly for its joy and for your own happiness. You, the poor and meek, you will not rob it, you will not deform it, and when the day comes you will give it back to Me as I have given it to you."

The men heard these words:

"Woe to ye violent, for nothing shall belong to you, neither souls nor body nor land, and what ye take shall be taken from you.

"Woe to all you who are already thinking of repudiating Me, who gaze on Me with angry eyes because in your thoughts you demand of Me, not only the whole earth, but also Heaven, now and immediately. Woe to you because you know that you are not deserving, and intend in spite of this knowledge to take these gifts by force."

The children smiled.

"Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. Ye are blessed who accept present sorrow, and who bless it as a promise of eternal joy. You have measured all the joys of the world. You know that they would not fill your hearts, and you are preparing for the one eternal joy. The tortures of the spirit are caused by the sharp corners of its limitations.

Anguish of heart, anguish of flesh, are caused by the sins of the flesh and of the heart. Birth is death's threshold, the years grave the wound of the spirit deeper, but nothing shall astonish you, and you are preparing joyfully for your deliverance."

The men heard these words:

"Woe to ye refined and the pleasure-seekers, who live in luxury and pleasure because you have chosen your lives so and will have no others. Woe to you who misunderstand the principle of life. Do you not know that your fathers wept? Why deny the inheritance of their tears? And you cannot even enjoy the benefits which your hearts covet. Sad hearts are filled with tenderness, and the poor have time to admire the visions of the world. But egoists and pleasure-seekers dare not love, for fear that life or death shall come and separate them from the things they love. They only see the emptiness which misfortune digs in tender hearts, for they

would fill up the void with rivers of tears, and the vision of the world which the poor enjoy is, for the so-called rich and so-called careful men, as though it did not exist. For they have no leisure, and they are blind to all but the necessity of the moment. They waste all their days defending themselves against ruin and against sickness, against thieves and against years, against death itself. Egoists! You are deceived, for you will die, and you will go down into death by the staircase of despair. You will fall into death as into an abyss, and into this abyss your minds will precede you.

The children comprehended.

"Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after justice; for they shall have their fill. Blessed are ye when men persecute you for justice's sake, for yours is the kingdom of Heaven.

"Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you, untruly, for My sake."

In these words the men heard:

"Woe to ye who do not govern your lives in accordance with justice, for I shall deny you at the last day. Woe to ye who, busily discussing what is just and what is unjust, discussing law, discussing equity, claim to possess the truth when your minds are lighted only by science. In you I recognise the falsely rich, the violent, the cowardly, all those who misunderstand the real benefits of life, who refuse to put their necks under My yoke, who repudiate the pure tradition of their fathers and the only Law. You are born yesterday, and you think that the world began with you. So as to obtain a triumph for the things of which to-day you are certain, and in which you will not believe to-morrow, you do not hesitate to overthrow the State, to foment wars among the people. Your insolent domination is witness that evil has reached its apogee. Your insolent domination will revive in all young hearts a passion for

patience and for respect if these young hearts listen to Me. But those who, in their insolence have been the masters, will be thrown out into outer darkness."

The children comprehended.

"Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.

"Blessed are ye, all ye who know how to pardon, who allow your brother to learn the beginning of life through his mistakes, and who for this reason forgive him his debt seven times and seventy times seven. I will forgive you your debt seven hundred times seventy, and even more often, for they have a right to pity who practise pity. When they respect their brother it is Me whom they respect. Me, who am burdened with the sins of all the world. It is Me whom they respect in the person of their brothers when they do not forget the divine dignity which I have given to humanity. And they love God more than themselves, yet is it themselves whom they

love, and in pitying their brothers it is their own weaknesses to which they show compassion."

In these words the men heard:

"Woe to ye who are pitiless, for I shall be without pity unto you.

"Woe to ye who judge and who condemn your brothers as though you had no share of responsibility in the crime for which you make them responsible. Do you not owe half the fine to which you sentence the thief, the adulterer, and the bearer of false witness? You, whose lives are a perpetual teaching of all evil? Whatever be your rank, whether you be judges, merchants or soldiers, you are all Pharisees, and all of you pass judgment. It is you who will be sentenced at the last hour, and there shall be no appeal for you, for it will not have been by your means that the man whom you have condemned has been spared from the penalty which you inflicted on him. So shall you learn too late that every time that you pass

sentence you were your own judge and your own victim, and it will no longer be time then to cry aloud for pity from your brothers or from Me."

The children comprehended.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they shall see God.

"Blessed are ye who have no share in the pollutions of the age, who wait for Me at the baptismal font. It is you at whom men laugh, and at whom they point the finger of disdain with an envy which their disdain tries to cover. It is you who are the real human beings. It is you who realise the first Divine Conception. It is you who have conquered life, for you possess your soul within yourselves, and it is you who, if the servants of the Evil One did not cumber the earth, would disarm the jealousy of the angels. They would come down from Paradise to conclude with you the alliance which was intended from the beginning. And the Thrones and the Virtues, which are

God's own, would descend upon humanity to help life along the last journey but one to endless happiness."

What the men heard was:

"Woe to ye who pander to evil desire. Woe to you all, to all of you, for there is not one of you who does not betray his man's mission every day by allowing his memory and his imagination to sink down by roads of mud into the night. The slime in which filthy beasts wallow is a sun and a blue sky compared with the ways which are the only ways in which ye wander. Yet it is you, even you, who praise without ceasing the century in which you live, and who are proud of the great things which science and industry have accomplished during your lifetime. And you go on your road crying, 'Victory!' declaring that your fathers lived barbarically, and that true civilisation is the result of your labour. When by the brutal light of your own lamps I gaze at you, I do not recognise My own

creation. In this elementary and frivolous stream of flame you have drowned the light of your eyes and the light of the stars. I recognise no longer either the music of the human voice, or the logic of your idioms, or the harmony of your voices, in the words which you exchange at long distances by means of machines whose nature you already share. Your mark upon the world is mere ugliness, significant of the real savagery which is in you. Significant of your vanity, of your weakness, of your violence, of your avarice, and of the low thoughts and passions with which you pander to your intelligence and to your heart. You purify with care the outside of the platter and the cup, but within you are full of iniquity and impurities. You promise yourselves intellectual development, but by the ways of your science, of your vices, you are going back to the monkey, whom you accept as an ancestor rather than admit that I have given you your life."

The children comprehended.

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."

"Blessed are ye who can honestly say that you have never hated anybody, that you love all men, even your enemies. You raise your hand only to show those who are in doubt the goal for which they seek, and to put them into the right path. You speak only to ask your brothers what their needs may be, to give them the advice of your experience or the consolation of your tenderness. Even in the fury of war you would remain wise and peaceful, having no hatred, being truly, simply, and healthily human, perfectly human as your Holy Father is perfectly divine."

What the men heard was:

"Woe to ye enemies of peace, for you shall be called the children of the devil. Woe to ye who live among your brothers as wolves among a fold. All men are your enemies and you are perpetually at war with them. You beat your children

and you ill-treat them, or even, and this is far worse, you are mere strangers to them. To the weak you are torturers, to the strong you are rogues. You call them up for judgment. You rob them by stratagem, hiding under the cloak of the laws. You have no faith, and no love, and yet you pretend to be honourable men because your crimes escape the legal definition of a crime, and it would therefore be a danger for anyone to reproach you with them. But you will be reproached with them one day. On the formidable Day of Universal Witness."

The children comprehended; the men trembled with fury and despair.

For one moment Jesus remained silent, smiling in answer to the smiles and gazing calmly and implacably at the furious looks.

Then He spoke again, and this time all heard what He said in the same words.

"I have not come to abolish the law,

but to accomplish it. The law is eternal, immutable, universal. It orders the life of Nature as it orders the life of the spirit, and it should be enough for you, O blind, to open your eyes and know the truth. For the plan of the universe is One. I have come to remind you of this unity, which should also be that of your inner lives, of your Life. I have come to remind you of the principles which your science denies, and which are denied by your progress. I have come to remind you of the one meaning of all things, which the first glance of the first man clearly understood when I said 'Eppheta.' He saw everywhere the image of truth, as you would see it if your eyes were without guile, if things could ever appear to you for the first time. But you are all of you corrupters of the holy past, from which you ought to draw unceasingly as from the unquenchable spring of all wisdom. You are the victims of recent hab-

its which are born of your pride and your ignorance.

"You do not join your efforts to those of your fathers, not knowing that the true orientation of the future lies in the past. You dream of crossing boundaries which ages have respected until now, and which I set down for you. You are the adversaries of the spirit. Beware lest I abandon you to the illusion of victory.

"You bring your children up in falsehood. You charge their memories with vain bits of knowledge which are mere grains of sterile sand, and, to deceive their hunger for justice and for love, you babble to them of the rights of man, of Socialism, of solidarity. You praise the great things which you say you have done for the happiness of the humble and of the poor, for the pensions which you have assured to the old and sick, for the ceaseless war which you wage against misery and sickness. Believing yourselves to be

better and wiser than the old priests and the prophets, you teach interested virtue, declaring that if your children wish to live long in the land they must not honour their father and mother but themselves. It is man himself whom man ought to respect, for intemperance and incontinence produce all disasters. But you are beginning to tremble before your children, for you are already beginning to see on their lips while you teach them their lessons, a smile which makes you uneasy. Beware lest they soon treat you as you treat your fathers at whom you scoff. Beware lest they practise at your expense your own miserable wisdom. Beware lest I abandon you to the misfortune of having persuaded them.

"O hypocrites, ye have taught them too much. Why should they not laugh at your morals, O preachers of prudence, for they know that the State must fall to pieces if you were listened to. How can they forget that you live and that you

cause them to live, by drunkenness and fornication? O you who tax the vices which your eloquent indignation reproves. Every virtue in the world which you have made, and which excludes all virtue, would be the worst of all possible misfortunes, and that you know.

"O hypocrites, ye need not pretend to love life. You will not deceive the living very long. They are already beginning to understand your true thoughts. They have seen why you fear them, and even now they are thinking of this fear as your only wisdom. O cowards, O professors of cowardice, you wait for man to be old before you hold out a helping hand to him. You wait until the strong man has used up his energy and has succumbed under the weight of labour and of years. Then, not till then, you will help him to end his days in peace. O ye who have never lived, O ye dead, bury your dead and let the living live. It is when a plant is full of sap that it should be helped to

grow, to seek the air and Heaven, to produce all its flowers and all its fruits. It is when man is still in his youth and in harmony with Nature, which is eternally young, that man should have all light, and all help, and should be saved from error and from sin. It is then that he should be prevented from deceiving himself with mere appearances. It is then that he should be helped to find his place in the kingdom of God.

"But ye seek first the kingdom of God. You received this command twenty centuries ago, and you know that, being divine, it is true also in its human meaning. Seek ye first accomplishment according to the premises of your own truth. Add your own light to the torch of the world. Shelter it between your hands lest the rain and the wind extinguish it. When your eyes open at the crossroads take the path which leads upwards. You will meet Me there, and you will be dazzled with joy at the discovery of your-

selves in Me. Seek ye first My kingdom. It is yours. You will know yourselves in coming to Me, by your disdain for all which is not the interest of the Supreme Being, by the cultivation of your own perfections. For the world is nothing, and I reckon the world as nothing if it be interposed between Me and you. There are but I who am your perfection, and you who are on the way to your perfection. Whatever draws you from Me turns you from yourselves. I adjure you to live. I ask of you the flowers of heroism and of genius, whose seeds I put into you lovingly. Everything is an element of life for everyone who makes the resolution to live. Everything is life, effort, pain, even sin. Live! Live in the sweet intoxication of the wine of life. Live in the ecstasy of the ordinary miracle of every day. Live without ceasing. Love life, for life is the way to the Kingdom. Only those die who have not chosen to live. Look for the Kingdom."

The shining face of Jesus spread its brightness on the faces of the women and the children, and the men themselves, shivering with hope and with fear, waited and hesitated to be asked to take the road to the Kingdom, for they felt that now the words of Jesus did not regard them. And some of the women, too, felt that the words of Jesus did not regard them either. And Jesus finished, speaking for them and to them.

"The generation which has reached maturity will not have the strength that it should have to take My road, for already the abomination of desolation has found its place in the temple of its heart. Adulterous generation which fails to recognise the three virtues! Generation of pride! Ye think ye have found your proper nature by your own intelligence, and that is why I have stricken you with blindness and with sterility. Loveless generation! Ye think that truth can be the conquest of intelligence reduced to

itself, of the spirit eternal. But I did not create man in several people. Man is but one. I do not allow the reason of man to silence his heart. While man thinks, his heart in which I have ordered him to merge the centre of his bodily and of his moral life, does not cease to beat.

"Will man ever reckon up the hours during which his brain takes necessary leisure while his heart continues its beating faithfully? The centuries will never know a worse disease than this cold, talkative, authoritative intellectuality. It leaves this miserable generation wavering between the empty abyss of its soul, from which it has exiled Me, and the empty abyss of a world which is slipping back into original darkness. O frivolous generation! Pure intellectuality ends in nothing but pure materiality. The spirit left to itself contradicts and disperses itself, resigning itself to the slavery of the elementary forces. The resignation which I ask of you is liberation. You

have preferred to that the bitterest of slavery. I call you to a union of hearts from which is born unity of spirit. You turn away from Me to scatter yourselves into space and into time. I can hope nothing more of you. Withered hearts and withered branches must be cast into the fire and must return to those elements of time and space from which they come, according to My will, but which they should have made to prosper in My love.

"Wicked and adulterous generation! Ye have killed with every possible torture those who come to you from Me. The seers you sentence to shameful punishment, by sentences which you never formulated, but which were always understood. They bear witness against you, and I cannot refuse to hear them, and their witness is your destruction. O flatterers, sycophants, Pharisees, O men of science. You have no idea of revising the sentence which you have passed upon my sermons. I shall ask you to render

account to me of the martyrdom of my servants, and you will have to pay in its entirety the debt you contracted to them.

"You must disappear so that My thought may spring up and may fructify in the souls of the younger generation. And the last delays will be short. Their period has always begun. You have announced this yourselves. You intellectual men, who know all that is written in books of the moment, if you had not forgotten everything, if you knew as much as men knew in the early days, you would not need Me to teach you to-day that the vulgarisation of knowledge is one of the signs of the end. For this vulgarisation is nothing but pulverisation. The universal ignorance of what it is necessary to know has, far from growing less, grown greater, by this vulgarisation. For all this lighting, science has set man out of the path which would take him to the real truth, to Me. And if you knew how to read, you would understand that

your books point to the end of time, for, very properly, they count the years which sky and earth have yet to live, and calculate the accidents which may lessen the number of these years. From these speculations spring counsels of folly and of violence. This preoccupation of the end to come, this conviction that the days of the earth have no future, discourage hope. But I who have promised eternity to you have no pardon for those who despair. Between Me and the young hearts in which I have lighted the hope of re-birth you must disappear, you withered intellectuals and sensual egoists. You who hash up dry truths which deceive both the heart and the reason. I hand ye over to the darkness which ye have chosen for yourselves, for ye have sinned against love and against the spirit.

"To My children I say, 'Watch and pray. Love one another.'"

Little by little every man bent his head under the weight of this just and irrevocable sentence. The women and children bent their heads too with mixed feelings, of pity for those who had been sentenced, and of hope for themselves. The vivid words had ceased to vibrate, heads were raised, and a look of astonishment came into all eyes. Jesus was no longer there! The crowd became wildly excited. Astonishment, deception, consternation, drove it mad.

At first it remained silent, for it did not understand. Then there was a movement of revolt. Reproaches, insults, and blasphemies were heard on every side, mingled with incoherent supplications.

The people on the square on the hill top had to fight against the crowd which pushed up from below. This necessity of fighting for their own existence made them forget the terror which the sudden and mysterious disappearance of Jesus had engendered.

Suddenly the crowd melted in a wild rush down to the bottom of the hill, and the rumour of His disappearance spread throughout the town like lightning.

In a few moments it was known that there was no longer any hope—that Jesus had disappeared. People left Montmartre as an audience leaves the theatre when the curtain has fallen. The men, frowning and miserable, forsook the place where they had received sentence as quickly as they could. The young mothers walked more slowly, exchanging as they went happy glances with the girls and children.

The journalists went down into the town in silence and gloom, walking in little groups.

Narda walked alone, getting a little farther from his comrades at every step.

Larrivé ran after him, and Narda

shrugged his shoulders in a way which the other did not understand.

"No, no," said Larrivé, "I'm not going to bore you. I only want to know one thing. Are you going to make a long story of it?"

"I don't think we need bother ourselves about it," said Narda. "If I were you I would have a chat with your editor before you begin writing."

"The fact is," said Larrivé, "that if we had to write a full account of all we have just heard—— Tell me, between ourselves, what do you think of it?"

"It doesn't interest me."

Larrivé nodded.

"Nor me. He's done for Himself."

Narda gave him his hand and moved on, but Larrivé held Narda's hand fast in his own.

"You don't mean to say that you are not going down to the paper?"

"My dear fellow," said Narda, "I re-

peat, the whole thing is of no further interest. There will be twenty lines in the paper to-night, and those twenty lines will be the same in every rag in Paris."

"It's about time we began to write of something else. Don't you think so?"

"At all events, we shall not be asked to write any more about Him."

Narda shook himself free and disappeared in the crowd.

He longed to be alone, alone in his room. He wanted to sit by the fireside and try for one last time to realise himself.

He grumbled as he walked.

He was tired, discouraged, worried by the feeling that he had been cruelly deceived, that there was no possible comfort. The future seemed to him a desert. He had been deceived by a mirage, and now he had fallen back into the abominable reality.

"Fortunately there is death," he said aloud. But his voice showed him the

meaning of his thoughts, and he shuddered.

"Have I actually got as far as that? Am I really longing for death? After all, it's quite logical. Since the life which we have made for ourselves is unbearable, there are but two ways out of it. We must either die or follow Him; as it is impossible to follow Him . . ."

Surprise grew on him at the certainty with which he affirmed this impossibility. He could not understand the new and apparently definite side of his conscience. "It is impossible, and it will never be possible. I am absolutely assured, now, of all I said the other day. All is misery. He appears to ignore the conditions, the elements, the modern fatality of our life. He goes on talking as though America had not been discovered. And yet He seems to hope. He seems to reckon on the coming generation. What innocence! Even if we admit that young people who

have seen Him understand and love Him, we who are older are here to put that right, to make them understand, to turn them from this folly of the Cross. No, no. We could no more live in His shadow than He can live in us. Life calls to us away from Him, and against Him. He spoke just now of a re-birth, and it is not the first time that He has spoken of it, but to-day we will take Him at His word. We must aspire to the resurrection of the flesh, and we do not understand this as He understands it. We shall not wait till the Last Day to celebrate this re-birth. This is how we shall obey the injunctions of this Saviour, and so shall He not have come altogether in vain."

As he slipped his key into the lock of his door Narda felt his fingers tighten on the metal, and he had the impression that he was going to violate the solitude of his retreat, the pure silence of this room in which he had thought so many thoughts

entirely strange and contrary to those which were now in his mind.

Nervously he pushed the key into the lock, turned it and opened the door.

"It is not my fault. I was ready to listen to Him. His words are contradictory and unintelligible. He says live! and He says, 'Blessed are they that mourn.' I accepted the call to energy and love. I cannot accept the call to pain, to useless sacrifice. I consented to the creative effort, to the effort which affirms. I cannot agree to negative effort, to an effort which would cut off my own life from me. He said, 'Those only die who have not chosen to live.' But what He gives us as life is immediate death. How could those die who no longer exist? And this Kingdom of God of which He talks to us, which He orders us to seek, which prefaces in our beings heroism, holiness, perfection, it is nothing but a principle, which He tries to impose upon our will."

"No," concluded Narda, as he lit his lamp, "he shall not gain me. His morality is no clearer than scientific truth. It is impossible for me without light from above, which I have not received, to see in this harsh doctrine of His the remedy for our great wretchedness. It is as though He had not come. He would do well to go. We knew all that He is preaching. We have no further use for it. We can no longer desire it. Human conception cannot admit the divine expression. The time has passed when people died of laughter, when the salt water of our tears was the necessary elixir of life. The world is sick of the words 'eternal compensation.'"

He went to his writing table, and turned over a number of manuscript notes, newspaper cuttings, and pamphlets.

"Let's get back to serious work, to practical necessities, to really useful things. I've allowed my mind to wander far too long; to-morrow I must make my liveli-

hood again. 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God!' Rubbish!"

His hand faltered an instant among his papers, his gaze became distant, a shocking expression of sorrow harrowed his countenance.

"I know," he thought to himself, "that this hour marks in my life the beginning of my final and irremediable decadence. I consent to it. When I thought that I recognised Him it seemed to me that I had been calling for Him always, and I felt myself growing out towards Him. That moment was supreme. It was the only real minute in my life. I felt myself raised out of myself and above my poor comrades by an all-powerful breath of hope. But I have fallen back, I have fallen back lower than I was before, lower than all the other fellows were, for they have never had the flash of comprehension which was vouchsafed to me. And now there can be no further redemption for me. What do I lack? Intelligence?

Innocence? Courage? It doesn't matter. It's too late now."

Tears swelled up in Narda's eyes; he closed them. And under the closed lids he saw a landscape of stone and metal. He saw the picture of a large town in which, at stated distances, the lamps lit up the darkness. Numbers of citizens, each one of whom looked exactly like his neighbour, went, slowly and with measured step, indifferent to all things, along the cold streets. He watched them, noting their heavy walk, their bent heads, and he saw that their only care was the care for every day. The day which was dying in the heavens, and in their soul was the yesterday and the to-morrow of other pale, monotonous and empty days. All these passers-by walked in the same direction, towards the end of the town. As they walked, the lights grew fewer, and at the end it was quite dark. It seemed to Narda that these pilgrims of emptiness represented humanity, as it is,

the immense neutral wave of time. These wise men did their day's work every day straightforwardly and proudly, sadly and patiently, and with no appreciable motive. If they now and again listened to the seers and the apostles, who tried to tell them of a motive which should ennoble their activities, who tried to show them beyond the dark streets where the town ended, a brightness greater and purer than that of the lamps, they very soon realised that there was no truth in the words of the seers and apostles. They soon turned away from them to begin or to continue their labour, to build great houses by the river side, to wait comfortably for death, or to carry heaps of stones from one side of the road to the other, to heap gold up in the cellars, to judge one another and to sentence one another, to torture one another ingeniously, to murder trees and animals, to make innumerable objects which were necessary to their useless life. And this

vision, which was the world's past, was his future. Now that Jesus had spoken again and had spoken in vain, that was undoubtedly the unenviable future. The days would die one after the other, identically one with the other, in souls, which would be all alike, and would continue dying until the world had ceased to live. Men would continue to wander with weary hearts along the cold streets into the darkness. But as, under his closed eyelids, Narda watched the long, colourless procession, he wondered at the sight of one of the passers-by, who went up the street in the other direction, against the stream. He came out of the shadow. He walked towards the better lighted portion of the street. His step had spring in it, and was the step of a free man. He could not see his features very well, but he could see that in the man's face was a look of joy, and as he came nearer Narda recognised him. He recognised himself. Not quite the same man whom

he had seen in the looking-glass yesterday or a few moments before. This man was younger, and his eyes were brighter. His forehead was higher. Narda recognised himself as he might have been if he had taken another road, the road undoubtedly which this better half of his had taken. He saw his face now clearly, and he saw that it beamed with a radiant joy. This second self of his had just heard Jesus talking on the Mount. He had heard Him giving utterance to the immortal thoughts, which since his own childhood he had heard vaguely, in his heart and brain, and which until then he had vainly tried to put into lucid words. Jesus had put them into glorious words for him, and the young man, drunken with this glory, forgetful of the greyness of the moment and of the place, rushed to his lamp to write down the truth and to transmit it to the future generations, in undying verse which future ages should remember.

"So there shall always be seers and apostles to listen to Him," said Narda. "He has not come in vain, for this man heard Him. There shall always be seers who will hold out hands to one another across the emptiness of centuries, this man was one of them, and their hands will always meet, and will always be upheld in prayer to Him, so that He may pardon the unworthy."

VII

THE CRISIS ON THE BOURSE

"I AM perfectly certain of it," replied the Prefect of Police. "A few more days of this sort of thing and our public credit will go, to say nothing of our public money and"—here the Prefect dropped his voice—"of our Government."

"But what can be done?"

"I have come to you for the remedy, Monsieur le Président."

The President of the French Republic thought for a few moments. Then he said:

"To find the remedy we must lay hands on the cause of the trouble."

"I have had the honour of pointing it out to you. The trouble comes from the extraordinary honesty which has come into Paris like a new form of disease. As

you know, the mania has become general. Everybody is suffering from it. The magistrates, the men of business, the journalists, even the speculators have not escaped the disease, and the consequences are inappreciable and terrible."

"I know," the President interrupted with an impatient gesture. "I know. But what I want to know is, what I don't understand is, the explanation of this extraordinary, this monstrous wave of honesty."

"I think, Monsieur le Président, that you know as much on this point as I do."

The President looked fixedly at the Prefect.

"Perhaps I do," he said. "But tell me what is in your mind. Tell me whom you think responsible for this awful disaster."

"Mon Di . . . !" began the Prefect of Police. But he stopped before finishing the word. The exclamation was too apposite for him to finish it; the

two men, silent for a moment, stared at one another.

"Without doubt this wide-spread ruin which is threatening Paris is in some measure due to the presence in the city of the Man, who, since the 11th of December . . ."

"But there was trouble on the Bourse before He came."

"True. There was trouble on the Bourse two months ago, but He may have begun to show His influence from a distance, even before He came."

"It's quite plausible."

"I cannot," said the Prefect, "tell you the exact moment when the princes of finance began to make it understood that they would undertake none but strictly honest transactions. When I first learned of it, this tornado of purity had already been in full blast for more than a week. It was already a plague."

"And the contagion was universal?"

"Why, yes. Even the outside brokers

(who, as you know, are the business rivals of the sworn brokers, the *agents de change*) acted like men each one of whom had sworn to himself to be irreproachably virtuous for the future. One evening seven or eight weeks ago, I was told of an extraordinary phenomenon. Every one of the sixty-six *agents de change* who deal in a hundred and fifty thousand million francs of nominal capital, and the two hundred bankers who make up the outside market and who deal in twenty thousand million francs of bonds and shares, each of these two hundred and sixty-six men sent for the people they employed, and spoke to them as follows:

" 'Gentlemen, a new era has begun for the Paris Stock Exchange. From this moment we consider ourselves as priests of the priesthood of finance. We intend to be strictly and exclusively honest middlemen. Each one of us is nothing but a link in the chain by which the car of

public virtue is dragged along. We are together the most essential force of France. The credit of the people is measured by the property of its citizens. France's wealth is in its gold, and all States are our debtors. This immense expansion of French gold compensates for the deplorable decrease in the French birth-rate. But while we may take pride in our financial power, we must remember our duty. In the future, therefore, we will do no transactions which are not strictly honourable. It will not be easy to carry out this desire on our part. In the future, gentlemen, you must be very careful as to what orders you accept. Capitalists often deceive themselves. You must be careful not to gain undue influence through your friends or through the Press. You must not deal in any stocks or shares which are not worth their actual price. You cannot refuse all orders for the settlement. These are sometimes necessary, but you must refuse

them if they appear to you not to be given with an honest purpose. We will have no more liquidations where hundreds of millions, sometimes thousands of millions, of stock change hands without their adequate value in money. Gentlemen, we depend upon you. In the course of the next fortnight or at most in the course of the next month, all speculative positions on the Paris Stock Exchange must be closed. We may suffer in our material interests, but our profession and the Paris Bourse will profit morally. Our consciences are clear. We know our duty and we look serenely to the future.' "

"These were the words of every one of our princes of finance, and the clerks and the brokers thoroughly agreed with them."

"What madness," said the President.

"On the 7th of November," the Prefect went on, "the Bourse was busier than ever. There was a terrible uproar inside the building. The crowd round the

stand of the *agents de change* and in each one of the markets appeared to have gone mad. Liquidation was general. Speculators, whether for the fall or for the rise, closed their positions. There was no great and sudden change in prices, but prices weakened at the end of the day, for the magic mirage of distant hope had disappeared. The speculators had to close their positions, for they had been told that no orders would in future be taken from them unless they undertook to deliver or to take up their stock on settling day. The activity of the Bourse grew gradually less until the settling day on November 15th. The excitement on the 7th had been like a set-piece of fireworks, dazzlingly bright, but a precursor of darkness. Business slowed down on the Bourse. The brokers ceased to worry their clients to do business. The dealers on the Exchange refused all orders which seemed speculative. There were no more pieces of sensational news followed by

sharp rises and falls in prices. There were no more tips, there were no more operations from which the public suffered. Politicians no longer used their position to speculate upon the Stock Exchange. The liquidation of the 15th was a simple and an easy one. Very little stock changed hands, and comparatively little money. The Bourse had been purified without any swift change in prices, but weakness was the characteristic of the market. There was no excitement. There was very little business. The days on the Bourse seemed interminable, for the foolish practical jokes of men who had nothing to do were the only excitement. The Bourse became anæmic. Business was dying. On the 8th, as you may remember, I pointed out this grave state of affairs to the Prime Minister. Business was paralysed. Industrial and commercial firms began to be very uneasy. The restaurants and cafés had been practically empty for a fortnight. Nobody

supped any longer. The actresses began to complain bitterly. Much of their money came from operations on the Stock Exchange, and jewellers and dressmakers did no more business either. No motor-cars were sold. Luxury began to desert Paris. People were becoming economical, virtuous and poor. Indirectly but invincibly poverty grew upon the whole working population, the enormous population which lives on the luxuries and pleasures of the rich.

"The Prime Minister agreed with me that the evil was caused by the abominable crisis of virtue among the princes of finance, but we came to no practical conclusion."

"What can be done?" murmured the President. "He drove the money lenders out of the Temple."

"In the second half of November things got even worse. Nobody would do any business at all. The clubs, and the gambling hells, which the Government per-

mits in the big towns and in the watering places, became crowded. People deserted the Stock Exchange for baccarat, and immense sums of money were lost. Then all of a sudden, as perhaps you will remember, Monsieur le Président, a number of banking firms with resounding names established themselves round the Bourse and advertised enormously. They did an enormous trade, for all sorts of people, who were greedy of gain and greedy of emotion, gamblers of all kinds rushed to the bucket shops now that the Bourse no longer satisfied their passion.

"Naturally enough the public was terribly robbed. The Law Courts and I received countless complaints from all sides. The absence of business on the Bourse had brought in its wake a general rush to the gambling hells, and failures and suicides became general. French industry began to rock upon its base. The newspapers in Europe and in America prophesied 'the end of France.' The

Government found it impossible to collect taxes. The economical, commercial, and industrial well-springs of France began to dry up. Nobody would do any real business. Two months of honesty had sunk the country into a lethargy which was terribly like the sleep of death."

"Horrible."

"You are right, Monsieur le Président. This state of things was horrible. But there was worse to come."

"I know, I know."

"Yes, you remember the extraordinary phenomenon of the blank pages in the newspapers, the miracles in the town halls, in drawing-rooms, and in the streets. You have not forgotten the supernatural boredom which gradually sapped the springs of Parisian activity. The gambling houses died away as the Bourse had died away. The gamblers were converted as the princes of finance had been converted. There are no more

thieves in Paris, now. It is the end of everything. The Treasury has no more money, and has been obliged to stop the payments which were made at first to the restaurant keepers and publicans so that the people who had no work to do should get amusement. We are lost, Monsieur le Président. To-morrow rioting is bound to come. It is the end of everything. Unless——"

The President had been sitting with his head in his hands.

"Unless," he said.

"Let's talk it over," said the Prefect simply.

The President spoke no word, but looked at the Prefect of Police, and there was a question in his eyes.

"With your consent I will go at once and ask Him to . . ."

The two men caught one another's eye, and both men nodded.

"But will He consent?" asked the President, after a moment's silence.

"I think so. Resistance is not usual with Him."

"But the people? Is there nothing to be feared from them?"

"Certainly not. We must not forget the fund of commonsense in the people of Paris. They dislike anything extraordinary, and they have had enough of this."

"Then, my dear Prefect, don't lose a minute. Be as quick as you can."

The Prefect was bowing to take his leave.

"One second," said the President of the Republic, keeping him back by a button of his coat. "Is to-day not the 24th of December?"

"Exactly."

"Then it is on Christmas Day that you are going to . . .?"

VIII

THE REJECTION

IT was evening, the evening of December 25th. There had been no sunshine all day. The sky, which was heavy, looked a dirty copper colour and showed that a snow-storm was hanging over the town.

In spite of the darkness there was not a light in the windows. Even the street lamps, with incredible negligence, had not been lit.

At four o'clock there was hardly a soul to be seen, even in the busiest streets. The black silence of the sky had gained the houses. The town appeared to be hiding what it was doing or what it was allowing to be done, as though it had understood that darkness was necessary for the deed. For in spite of the precautions which had been taken to keep it

secret, the expulsion order had become known to the whole of Paris as soon as it had been decided on.

This kind of universal and simultaneous divination may be reckoned as one of the most extraordinary phenomena of this memorable time, and what was stranger still was that, though everybody knew about it, nobody spoke of it.

The newspapers, which had only given three lines to the Sermon on the Mount, said nothing of it at all. The papers spoke once more of the ordinary things of ordinary life, of politics, of science, of feminism, of railway accidents, of the state of the streets of Paris, of the dresses of well-known actresses, of crimes, of murders, and of the coming boom in business.

The conspiracy of silence had organised itself spontaneously. It seemed to have been organised with the complicity of the Heavens and of the darkness.

The automobile of the Prefect of Police ran swiftly and unimpeded through the deserted streets to *L'Hôtel des Trois Rois.*

The Prefect was received at once.

When he entered the little room where Jesus was waiting for him, he had the comfortable feeling that there would be no difficulty and no delay. Everything had, to all intents and purposes, been done already. It was now merely a matter of formality.

"Monsieur," said the magistrate with urbanity, "I have a delicate mission to perform."

Jesus had His cloak upon His shoulders, and His hat was in His hand.

"I am waiting," He said.

"In the name of the French Republic," said the Prefect, in a voice which trembled a little, "I have the honour and the regret to request you to leave Paris and France as quickly as possible."

Jesus smiled.

"I am used to these happenings," He said. "The Gadarenes made a similar request to me. I had, as you may remember, cast out a few poor Devils into a herd of swine, and these ran violently down a steep place into the sea. The inhabitants of that country besought Me that I would depart out of their coasts."

The Prefect bit his lips.

"May I feel assured," he said, "of Your respect for our laws?"

"Depart," said Jesus.

7.5.11

THE END

DATE DUE

PQ 2625 .076 E81 1911

Morice, Charles, 1861-1919.

The re-appearing (Il est ressuscité)

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